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A SATIRICAL COMEDY

In Three Acts

By HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN
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AT THE

CRITERION THEATRE, LONDON

LADY EPPING'S LAWSUIT

A SATIRICAL COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

HUBERT HENRY DAVIES

PERFORMED FOR THE FIRST TIME

ON OCTOBER 12, 1908

COUNTESS OF EPPING	. MISS MARY MOORE
LADY LUCY LISTER.	. MISS ELFRIDA CLEMENT
LADY BEACROFT	. MISS ANNE CLEAVER
EVELYN HUGHES	. MISS GRACE LANE
MISS VANDERHIDE	. MISS NORMA WHALLEY
MISS BERENGARIA MORTIMER	
	MRS. SAM SOTHERN
MISS FERRIS	. MISS FRANCES VINE
EARL OF EPPING	. MR. JOHN TOKE
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	MR. THOMAS BRAIDON
USHER	. MR. TOOSE

*Barristers, solicitors, clerks, pressmen, footmen, and the
general public*

Act I.—The Drawing Room at Epping House

Act II.—The Library of Lord Epping's House in Berkeley Square

Act III.—Courtroom X King's Bench Division

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Lady Epping's Lawsuit

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE.—*The drawing-room at Epping House. Two large French windows at the back which being open show an extensive view of lawns, flower gardens, and trees. There is a door on the right. The furniture and hangings are of rich pale green brocade. There is a settee large enough to take two people easily, three at a pinch, and about the room are chairs, tables and the usual furniture of such a room. It is about five o'clock in the afternoon of a fine summer Sunday.*

As the curtain rises EVELYN HUGHES, a pretty young woman, is seated on the sofa reading a book. JOHN enters.

JOHN.

If you please, mum, there's a Miss Ferris called.

EVELYN.

You'd better tell her ladyship; she's in the garden.

JOHN.

She's asking for Mr. Paul Hughes.

EVELYN.

Oh! What does she look like?

[*Enter MISS FERRIS. Exit JOHN. MISS FERRIS is a hustling blonde about thirty-five. She is rather overdressed in a cheap way. Several attempts at the latest fashions but not too unlikely. She comes to EVELYN and offers her hand. Her manner is extremely genial and effusive.*]

MISS FERRIS.

Are you Mrs. Hughes?

EVELYN.

Yes.

MISS FERRIS.

His wife, of course.

EVELYN.

I am my husband's wife.

MISS FERRIS.

How proud you must be of him!

EVELYN.

Very.

MISS FERRIS.

What a success it was ! A veritable triumph ! No more slump in the British Drama now that your husband has come to the rescue. After such a play as "Glass Houses"—his first play too—I feel sure that he will soar to the top-most pinnacle of fame. But I'd better introduce myself.

EVELYN.

Please.

MISS FERRIS.

I am "The Gentleman's Friend."

EVELYN.

[*Quite shocked.*] I beg your pardon.

MISS FERRIS.

The new paper of that nomenclature.

EVELYN.

Oh, yes. How kind of you to come and congratulate us.

MISS FERRIS.

[*They are both seated by now.*] I am proud to have this opportunity of doing so—as an Englishwoman—as one who was present on the first night of "Glass Houses." I was so excited when the author was called that I am told I stood up and waved my mouchoir. I dare say you saw me. I was in the dress circle.

EVELYN.

I don't think I saw anything just then.

MISS FERRIS.

I was so afraid the papers would mention it—but they didn't.

EVELYN.

The papers have been so good to us.

MISS FERRIS.

All the best critics liked the play.

EVELYN.

But better still—all the worst ones *dis*liked it.

MISS FERRIS.

I see where your husband gets some of his trenchant wit.

EVELYN.

Oh, no. He wrote his play all himself.

MISS FERRIS.

Really—how interesting—because, as you know, whenever a man succeeds the world always asks who the woman was. But we mustn't sit gossiping.

EVELYN.

Why not?

MISS FERRIS.

I am here professionally.

EVELYN.

Oh!

MISS FERRIS.

To interview your husband.

EVELYN.

[*Embarrassed.*] Oh, how kind, but unfortunately he has made it a rule never to be interviewed.

MISS FERRIS.

But I have an appointment with him.

EVELYN.

It *must* be a mistake.

MISS FERRIS.

He made it himself. Yes. He wrote to me before he left London and said he would be spending Saturday to Monday at Epping House and could give me a few minutes after luncheon on Sunday if I came down.

[*She moves to the window.*]

EVELYN.

I'd better go and ask him. Will you excuse me?

MISS FERRIS.

[*Cheerfully.*] Certainly, dear, certainly. [EVELYN goes out into the garden. Miss FERRIS takes out her note-book and pencil, and writes in shorthand as she speaks in a dry tone.] "I was shown into the palatial drawing-room at Epping House where Mr. Paul Hughes was spending Saturday to Monday as the guest of the Earl of Epping, and his elegant and accomplished countess. For an hour or so I sat chatting with our dramatist's charming wife. The time passed so agreeably that I had almost forgotten my mission till my eye lit on the handsome ormolu clock which adorned the mantel. 'Tempus fugit,' I said laughing. Mrs. Hughes laughed too, and just then ——"

[PAUL HUGHES enters from the garden followed by EVELYN. PAUL is a man about thirty. He looks like any other well-dressed, well-bred London man, and shows no signs of being an author either in dress or manner. He comes to MISS FERRIS and they shake hands.]

PAUL.

Good-afternoon. It's very good of you to come all this way. I hope you are going to let me off easily.

MISS FERRIS.

[*Laughing.*] Oh, that's very good. "Let me off easily"; I must jot that down. [*Makes a shorthand note.*] "Let me off easily." I should like to hear that spoken from the stage. [PAUL glances at EVELYN and smiles.] Suppose we begin. "No one was more surprised than I that the public should see anything in my poor little play."

[*She writes in her note-book.*

PAUL.

[*Embarrassed.*] Oh—well—if you like.

EVELYN.

Paul! You are *not* going to let that go in? We always *knew* you'd have a great success.

PAUL.

Yes, dear, but that wouldn't look well in an interview. [*Quickly to MISS FERRIS.*] Don't say I said that.

MISS FERRIS.

Very well. What decided you to adopt the career of a dramatist?

PAUL.

Want of cash.

EVELYN.

Ambition.

[*She thumps PAUL.*

PAUL.

[*Hastily.*] Oh, yes—ambition.

MISS FERRIS.

[*Writing.*] “The fierce devouring flame of creation burning within me.”

PAUL.

Don't make it look as if *I* said that. It sounds so silly. Make it look as if *you* said it.

EVELYN.

[*To PAUL.*] Wouldn't you like to write your own interview, Paul?

PAUL.

[*In a whisper to EVELYN as MISS FERRIS writes.*] Take care, dear. All this is going into print. I want you to appear as the humble and adoring wife of a man of genius.

MISS FERRIS.

It may truthfully be said “you awoke to find yourself famous.”

EVELYN.

He knew it before he went to sleep.

MISS FERRIS.

Now something about early struggles.

PAUL.

I'm sorry to say I never starved in a garret.

MISS FERRIS.

Just as well. The garret is out of date.

PAUL.

Of course I worked very hard for ten years or so.

MISS FERRIS.

[*Writing.*] Did ten years' hard labour!

PAUL.

[*Protesting loudly.*] No!

MISS FERRIS.

Of course not. That would make you appear too old. Can you recall any amusing incident among your early experiences?

PAUL.

I—remember one day—when I went fishing——

EVELYN.

Don't attempt it, dear. You are *not* good at stories.

MISS FERRIS.

Of course you are besieged by managers?

PAUL.

[*Looking doubtfully at EVELYN.*] Er . . .

EVELYN.

[*Promptly to MISS FERRIS.*] Yes. You can put *that* in.

MISS FERRIS.

Your favourite flower?

PAUL.

The petunia.

EVELYN.

[*Thumping him and irritated.*] Oh!

MISS FERRIS.

Sports and pastimes?

PAUL.

I'm fond of riding.

[*While MISS FERRIS makes a note EVELYN speaks in an undertone to PAUL.*]

EVELYN.

Darling, I think that sounds a little pretentious when you only had your first lesson last week.

PAUL.

Darling, this is my interview. [*To MISS FERRIS.*] I'm rather keen on golf.

MISS FERRIS.

A crack golfsman ! Now we've heard about your recreations tell us something about your work. Do you write all night, for instance, with a wet towel round your head ?

PAUL.

Of course not.

MISS FERRIS.

Though we are all so in love with your comedy, Mr. Hughes, we hope you are going to give us a serious play.

PAUL.

No one seems to think a play is serious unless it's about unpleasant people. However if you'll give me time I'll show you some most objectionable specimens of both sexes, and prove that all our English principles are wrong. I don't want people to think I have no ideas.

MISS FERRIS.

Are you going to write a classic ?

PAUL.

You can't write a classic till you are dead.

MISS FERRIS.

What are your views on the future of the British Drama ?

PAUL.

[*Coughing and bracing himself to deliver a speech he has evidently got off by heart.*] The British Drama is passing through a most critical stage. The flippancy of the age and the lateness of dinner are dealing death blows at serious, thoughtful work. But already we behold abundant signs that a brighter epoch is at hand. . . .

MISS FERRIS.

[*Quickly interrupting.*] Thank you. Now the snapshots. [*She goes to the door and calls.*] Mr. Pearson!

EVELYN.

Snapshots! You are not going to be snapped?

PAUL.

It's no use half doing it.

EVELYN.

Oh!

[*Enter MR. PEARSON. He is a businesslike young man with a camera.*]

MISS FERRIS.

This is our Mr. Pearson.

PAUL.

How d'you do?

MISS FERRIS.

Now—standing up in a natural attitude first. This is “Good-morning. Glad to see you.” Look pleasant, please.

[PAUL obeys instructions. PEARSON snaps PAUL with the camera.

PEARSON.

Thank you.

MISS FERRIS.

[*Pointing to a chair.*] Fling yourself down there in a posture of despair for “Oh, dear, I can't work to-day somehow.”

PAUL.

[*Obeys instructions.*] Will this do? [EVELYN laughs. PAUL glances at EVELYN and laughs.] Don't laugh. I'm trying to look like a great thinker.

MISS FERRIS.

[*Arranging PAUL in a posture of despair with his head on his hand.*] A little more so—yes—thank you—let me see—so—yes—thank you.

PEARSON.

Ready?

PAUL.

'M!

[PEARSON *snaps the camera at PAUL, then turns to MISS FERRIS.*

PEARSON.

One at the books, don't you think?

MISS FERRIS.

Yes. "My silent friends." [*To PAUL.*]
Stand there, please. [*Points to some books.*]
One hand on the books. Now—smile intelligently at Mr. Pearson.

[PAUL *smiles intelligently at PEARSON.*
PEARSON *snaps the camera.*

PEARSON.

Thank you.

MISS FERRIS.

Shall we do one in the garden?

[PAUL, MISS FERRIS *and* PEARSON *go towards the window. EVELYN faces them.*

EVELYN.

Oh, no, Paul. Not where all those people can see you.

MISS FERRIS.

Just as you like. We can do the one in the garden in the house. [*She points to the sofa.*]

Suppose you sit there—in a sprawling summer-like attitude. [PAUL *sprawls on the sofa.*] Mr. Pearson will fill in the shrubs and a sun-dial afterwards. [*She arranges PAUL's head and fingers.*] Frown, please. Remember you've got the sun in your eyes. [PAUL *frowns.*] Very good.

PEARSON.

Extremely pretty. [EVELYN *shows signs of great irritation.* PEARSON, *snapping camera at PAUL.*] Thank you.

MISS FERRIS.

Now one with your wife.

EVELYN.

No!

MISS FERRIS.

[*Joyfully.*] One with the baby.

[PAUL and EVELYN *look at each other extremely disconcerted.*

PAUL.

It isn't here.

[PEARSON *smothers a giggle.* MISS FERRIS *frowns at him.*

MISS FERRIS.

Never mind then. I think we have enough, so I won't take up any more of your *valuable* time.

PAUL.

[*Shaking hands.*] Good-bye.

MISS FERRIS.

Good-bye. I am sure the public will be deeply impressed by all you've said. Good-day, Mrs. Hughes.

EVELYN.

[*Bowing.*] Good-day.

MISS FERRIS.

Come, Mr. Pearson.

[*Exit* MISS FERRIS. PEARSON bows and follows her off.]

EVELYN.

Oh, the shame—the humiliation !

PAUL.

Nonsense, dear. It's nothing worse than a bore.

EVELYN.

You *loved* it.

PAUL.

[*Idly turning the pages of a book.*] One may as well make the best of it.

EVELYN.

But in the old days you said that advertising one's self with interviews and snapshots was so contemptible.

PAUL.

No one wanted to interview me or snap me then.

EVELYN.

Don't change, Paul.

PAUL.

Of course not, dear—but it's not my fault if the press wants to make an idol of me.

EVELYN.

[*Indignantly.*] An idol! You mean an Aunt Sally!

PAUL.

Really, Evelyn, I don't think you should speak so to a public man. With new dignities come new duties. They have a right to know exactly what I'm like.

EVELYN.

Who?

PAUL.

The people!

EVELYN.

Oh, Paul—how can you talk like that? The other day a monkey was interviewed—think of it—a monkey.

PAUL.

They say it has genius.

EVELYN.

Don't laugh at me, darling. I'm so anxious you should avoid making a fool of yourself. I know it's very hard.

PAUL.

No, dear—it isn't.

EVELYN.

I mean for any one who, like you, has been no one from nowhere all his life, and is suddenly some one everywhere. *I'd* rather pig along as we used to do than that any one should say you have a swollen head.

PAUL.

Nonsense, dear. I'm not the least bit of a snob.

EVELYN.

Then what are you doing *here*?

PAUL.

If Lady Epping was kind enough to ask us——

EVELYN.

After meeting us once at a dinner-party. It's such nonsense for you and me to be stay-

ing in a house like this—and if you knew how the footmen terrify me.

PAUL.

I feel it just as keenly as you do, but we must get used to it.

EVELYN.

It'll be the ruin of you if you do. You'll forget the humble human people. You'll go filling your plays full of dukes and duchesses and you'll get so mixed up—you won't know how to make them talk to their servants.

PAUL.

I'm observing all that now. I shall be servant-perfect by to-morrow.

EVELYN.

If I thought you'd be content with this one visit, but I see so well what's going to happen. You won't be satisfied with a countess. You'll want to stay with a duchess next. Then you won't rest till you know royalty, and by and by you'll begin to believe you are one of them.

PAUL.

Don't talk so well, darling, or people will say you write my plays.

EVELYN.

You won't write any more plays if you go on this way.

PAUL.

A dramatist ought to know all kinds of people, and it's a very good thing for a young author to have a rich influential woman like Lady Epping interested in him.

EVELYN.

[*Indignantly.*] Paul!

PAUL.

There's nothing in that.

EVELYN.

You wouldn't like it if I got a rich influential *man* interested in *me*.

PAUL.

That's different. [LADY EPPING *is seen through the window.*] Here's Lady Epping.

[LADY EPPING *enters. She is an elegant, dignified woman, with a gracious and grand manner and a very good opinion of herself. She is dressed in the latest and most expensive fashion.*

LADY EPPING.

Ah, there you are! [*To* EVELYN.] I've been playing "consequences" with the Judge

and Lady Beacroft and my little girls, and it turned out that I and your husband eloped, which set me wondering what had become of you. What are you doing in the house—you love birds?

PAUL.

I've had a wretched woman from a paper to interview me.

LADY EPPING.

We dramatists have to put up with so much of that. [PAUL and EVELYN look at LADY EPPING, then at each other. LADY EPPING looks from one to the other.] I write plays.

PAUL.

Oh, *do* you?

EVELYN.

How very interesting!

LADY EPPING.

I am told I possess the dramatic instinct to a remarkable extent.

PAUL.

[*Politely.*] I'm sure of it.

LADY EPPING.

[*Very much pleased.*] I'm sure, too, if you say so.

PAUL.

Have you produced many plays, Lady Epping?

LADY EPPING.

Not many, but I nearly had one accepted once.

EVELYN.

Have you written many?

LADY EPPING.

Fifteen.

PAUL.

Perhaps they are over the heads of the people.

LADY EPPING.

No, they're not. I've written all kinds—tragedies, comedies, great productions, cheap productions, plays that give all the actors a chance and plays that give none of them a chance—except the star; strong plays, and sweet pretty little plays like your "Glass Houses."

EVELYN.

[*Hardly able to conceal her indignation.*]
Lady Epping! "Glass Houses" is a masterpiece.

PAUL.

Evelyn dear !

LADY EPPING.

I don't know what the public want. I don't think they know themselves. And as for the managers—we all know *they* know nothing about it. The number of times I've had my plays returned.

EVELYN.

Paul got a manager for "Glass Houses."

LADY EPPING.

It's so easy for him. He just gets some actress to take a fancy to him, and there you are.

PAUL.

I never met my leading lady till the rehearsals.

LADY EPPING.

But you can go behind the scenes and get to know these people. Now I can't go hanging about bars.

PAUL.

We don't hang about bars.

LADY EPPING.

It's so difficult for a woman. They are all against us. I never have any luck.

PAUL.

That play which was nearly accepted. Perhaps you'll do something with *that*.

LADY EPPING.

I was abominably treated. After keeping it two weeks they sent it back—and what do you think the objection was? They said I couldn't have three outdoor scenes in one act. Why not? Convention, I suppose—just one of those silly conventions that keep our stage so far behind the French. Of course I wasn't going to alter my play just to suit an actor, but in the end I did. We got as far as talking terms. But their *ideas*! I suppose they thought that as I don't need the money they could get my play for nothing. But I held out for what I thought was just. I don't think I've any right to go and spoil the market.

PAUL.

Can't you do something else with your play?

LADY EPPING.

I had five copies made and sent them to five different actresses. They are all reading it now—so they say. I couldn't wait for them to read it one after another. They take so long making up their minds.

PAUL.

But suppose they all five accept it together?

LADY EPPING.

[*Seriously.*] Oh, they won't! [*Smiling at*
EVELYN.] I hope it doesn't bore you to hear
your husband and me comparing notes.

EVELYN.

Not at all.

LADY EPPING.

[*Smiling at* PAUL.] Would you like me to
tell you the plot of my last play?

EVELYN.

Please do.

LADY EPPING.

Well: It's a husband and wife, and he neglects her for his business, so she flirts with another man. That's the first two acts. The third is the *great* act. She comes to his rooms late at night, and then her husband comes, so she goes behind a curtain. Don't you think that's a good plot for a play?

[*She smiles from one to the other.*]

PAUL.

Excellent.

EVELYN.

Most original!

PAUL.

How do you end it?

LADY EPPING.

She gets tired of the hollow insincerity of the world and goes to the hilltops to contemplate eternity. That's a very beautiful scene. I wonder if it's too much like Ibsen to suit the British public. [*Having made up her mind to alter the end of her play.*] Perhaps she'd better go to the colonies. I understand the colonials are more virtuous than we are. [*Smiling sweetly at PAUL.*] Why don't you and I collaborate on a play?

PAUL.

[*Scarcely able to conceal his dismay.*] Oh, no!

EVELYN.

[*Trying to help PAUL out.*] I'm sure you'd regret it, Lady Epping. My husband has *such* a temper.

LADY EPPING.

Of course we should quarrel and fight. Collaborators always do. But what does that matter if we get our play on in the end?

PAUL.

I'm sure I couldn't work with any one.

LADY EPPING.

Yes, you could ——

PAUL.

Indeed, no !

LADY EPPING.

We'll try it, anyway.

PAUL.

Oh, but ——

[*Enter FOOTMEN with tea things which they put down. They then go out.*]

LADY EPPING.

We'll begin after tea. [LADY EPPING goes to the window while PAUL confers anxiously with EVELYN. LADY EPPING, calling into the garden.] Darlings—tea ! [*Exit LADY EPPING.*]

[*Enter MISS BERENGARIA MORTIMER.*]

MISS MORTIMER is obviously an actress. She is statuesque and handsome, and generally affects a languid manner of speaking and moving. She wears a flowing garment and an Empire waist—a large picture hat with plumes flowing over the shoulders. Her hair is loosely done and caught before it tumbles by jewelled combs and daggers.

EVELYN.

Now you see what you've let yourself in for.

PAUL.

Not before the servants, dear. Ah, here is Miss Berengaria Mortimer.

[EVELYN moves away.]

MISS MORTIMER.

I've been resting under the trees ever since luncheon.

PAUL.

Tired after your two performances yesterday?

MISS MORTIMER.

Oh, so, so tired. Let me go on telling you of my pet scheme. I want to have a little national theatre of my own, where I shall produce all the latest French and Sicilian horrors—to elevate the English stage.

EVELYN.

[*By the window.*] I knew the Judge would hurry in at the sound of tea—with that little barrister yapping at his heels.

PAUL.

Who?

EVELYN.

Mr. Clinton Perry.

[*Enter* JUDGE WRAY and CLINTON PERRY. WRAY is an elderly man of temperament, peevish and gay by turns and very gallant to ladies. He has a red, clean-shaven face. PERRY is a conceited, clever young barrister. He is engaging WRAY in conversation against his will as they enter. *Enter* also LORD OSWALD BRUCE-BANNERMAN.

PERRY.

But don't you think, my dear Judge, that in the interests of society—there ought to be a new court of criminal appeal? More liberal in its tendencies?

WRAY.

Young man, I never talk shop on a Sunday. Miss Mortimer—what a sad pity you couldn't come down till this morning. [*Exit* PAUL.

MISS MORTIMER.

My work claimed me—my art.

WRAY.

The party was dragging dreadfully till you came.

PERRY.

[*Hovering about* WRAY and MISS MORTIMER.] I always think an actress helps things along so.

MISS MORTIMER.

I seldom go to country houses. I shouldn't be here now only I'm going to act in America soon, and it helps you so much in the States if they know you are in society. They'll all come to see me when they hear I've stayed at Epping House.

PERRY.

Is your real name Berengaria?

WRAY.

Young man, Miss Mortimer is not one of your witnesses. [*To* MISS MORTIMER.] What a sweet name—Berengaria!

[*He pats her hand.*]

MISS MORTIMER.

I don't care so much about the Beren—but I love the Garia. It sounds so remote—like sighing winds—Garia.

WRAY.

[*Trying to make his voice sound like sighing winds.*] Garia! Shall we go there—by the window?

MISS MORTIMER.

I should love it.

WRAY.

[*As he goes to the window with MISS MORTIMER.*] Garia! [PERRY follows them.]

PERRY.

Did I tell you my story about the magistrate and the washerwoman?

WRAY.

Young man, I am about to relate an anecdote myself.

PERRY.

[*To EVELYN and OSWALD.*] Gay old bird! [*Enter LADY LUCY LISTER and MISS VANDERHIDE from the garden. LUCY is a smart, pretty, frivolous little spinster. MISS VANDERHIDE is a large handsome American girl with a good figure, faultlessly dressed. She uses a lorgnette constantly and cultivates a slow, supercilious manner and speaks carefully to try and overcome her American accent. PERRY meets them.*] Well, girls!

LUCY.

[*Sharply.*] Don't call us girls. You don't know us nearly well enough.

PERRY.

[*Importantly.*] I've been talking to the actress.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

[*Looking at EVELYN through her lorgnette.*] That woman talking to Lord Oswald is something of that sort, isn't she?

LUCY.

No, that's Mrs. Hughes—the new dramatist's wife.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

How odd your English society is! One never knows whom one will meet next. We're much more exclusive in New York. Our old families won't mix at all with the nouveaux riches.

LUCY.

I think it's rather a scandal the way Lord Oswald runs after Mrs. Hughes.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

Does he? I hadn't notussed.

[*She moves away and joins WRAY and*
MISS MORTIMER.

PERRY.

I say, Lady Lucy, you have put your foot in it.

LUCY.

Why? What have I said?

PERRY.

Lord Oswald is supposed to be after her,—the American—Miss Vanderhide. Of course when she came down she expected he'd be devoted to her.

LUCY.

And he spends all his time talking to Mrs. Hughes. What fun!

PERRY.

Lady Epping is furious about it.

LUCY.

Why?

PERRY.

Oswald Bruce-Bannerman is her brother, you know.

LUCY.

Of course I know.

PERRY.

Well, I suppose she wants to have the Vanderhide millions in the family.

LUCY.

Oh, I see. Then Lady Epping and Miss Vanderhide are both in a rage. How amus-

ing! I shall watch it all going on. I'm so glad I came.

[*Reënter* LADY EPPING with LADY BEACROFT and PAUL following her.]

LADY EPPING.

[*Severely.*] Oswald. [*Then sweetly.*] Oswald, darling.

OSWALD.

[*Turning to* LADY EPPING.] What is it?

LADY EPPING.

I want a word with you. [OSWALD goes to LADY EPPING. *She slips her arm through his affectionately, then says severely.*] You are jeopardizing your whole future by flirting with Mrs. Hughes, after I've spent my valuable time and thought trying to throw you and Ollie Vanderhide together. Go and talk to Ollie and don't leave her till we've done tea.

OSWALD.

You know, Flora—you do bully me.

[OSWALD goes to MISS VANDERHIDE.

Enter LORD EPPING and REV. DR.

GULL. *They come in from the*

garden as DR. GULL *speaks.* LORD

EPPING *is a smart military looking*

man about forty-five. He is politely

bored by DR. GULL *and all the party.*

DR. GULL *is a middle-aged Scotch divine, dressed as a Nonconformist minister. He speaks with a coarse Scotch accent, emphasizing his words with uncouth gesture.*

DR. GULL.

The Sawbath is the Sawbath, my lord, whether ye be in Scotland or whether ye be in England. The Sawbath is the Sawbath.

LADY EPPING.

Oh, look at my poor husband talking to that dreadful Dr. Gull. I thought I was so fortunate to secure the Caledonian Missionary for one of my parties, but he's such an awful bore.

LUCY.

Oh, but he's so funny when he eats fish.

LADY EPPING.

[*Reproaching LUCY severely.*] Lucy dear, I don't think you should speak like that of one of my guests.

OSWALD.

It's so like *you*, Flora, to ask a missionary to meet *us*.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

[*Looking at DR. GULL through her lorgnette.*] He wouldn't be received in New York.

LADY EPPING.

Don't say that, Ollie. It sounds silly. You have very good hotels in New York, and you have your tall sky-scraper buildings, and your telephones are much better than ours. But that's all—you have nothing else. [*Calling.*] Dr. Gull! [*Turns to MISS MORTIMER.*] Berry! [*DR. GULL comes towards LADY EPPING.*]

MISS MORTIMER.

[*Coming towards LADY EPPING.*] Darling one.

LADY EPPING.

I want to introduce Dr. Gull, the famous Caledonian Missionary, Miss Berengaria Mortimer, the celebrated actress.

[*DR. GULL and MISS MORTIMER shake hands.*]

LUCY.

Church and stage—how sweet!

LADY EPPING.

Take him over there, Berry, and give him a scone. [*They move away.*] Come here, Mr. Perry. I want you to pass cups. [*PERRY comes to her.*] You too, Mr. Hughes. [*PAUL goes to the tea table.*] All the young men.

WRAY.

Of course, of course.

[*WRAY hurries to the tea table also.*]

PERRY.

[*To WRAY.*] Don't you think there was a serious miscarriage of justice in the Pimlico murder trial?

WRAY.

Young man, I am about to have my tea. [LADY EPPING gives a cup of tea to WRAY, who takes a piece of cake and his tea and goes to the sofa where he sits between LADY BEACROFT and LUCY. WRAY, laughing and leering at them.] A rose between two thorns. [They all three laugh. PERRY brings two cups of tea to the sofa, giving one to LADY BEACROFT and the other to LUCY. He then goes back to the tea table. WRAY fixes PERRY with a scowl while he hands the cups and until his neck will turn round no further. WRAY, laughing and leering as before.] How happy could I be with either were t'other dear charmer away. [They all three laugh as before. PERRY brings the sugar and cream, and the same irritation of WRAY takes place. PERRY returns to the table. WRAY, laughing and leering as before.] Three's company, four's none. [They all three laugh as before. PERRY brings the cake-stand. Again the annoyance of WRAY. WRAY, after he has gone.] I hope he won't come and sit on the sofa with us!

[LADY EPPING gives PERRY two cups

of tea, and says, "Give this to Mrs. Hughes." PERRY moves to do so, and WRAY says "Spread yourselves." PERRY goes to EVELYN and giving her a cup sits beside her.

LADY EPPING.

[*Calling to PAUL.*] Come here, Mr. Hughes. The two dramatists *must* sit together. [PAUL comes and sits by her. She then announces to the room.] Mr. Hughes and I are going to collaborate on a play.

MISS MORTIMER.

Oh, will there be a part for me?

LADY EPPING.

Oh, yes. We must give Berry a part.

MISS MORTIMER.

A pathetic little servant maid with smuts on her face. That's the kind of part I've always longed to play, but they *will* make me be queens.

WRAY.

What's the play going to be about, Lady Epping?

LADY EPPING.

[*Seriously.*] We are going to scourge society.

LUCY.

[*Simpering.*] Oh, how amusing! I shall love that.

LADY EPPING.

You won't find it at all amusing, Lucy. It's to be a serious attack on the smart set.

WRAY.

Which vice are you going for? Same old thing? Bridge?

LADY EPPING.

That's not been decided. It's easy enough to get a vice. I think there are several things about us which might be improved.

DR. GULL.

[*Earnestly.*] Amen!

LUCY.

Did you hear Dr. Gull say "Amen"? How *sweet*!

WRAY.

[*To* LADY BEACROFT *and* LUCY.] Shall we three go and play the pianola?

LADY EPPING.

You can't have the music room; Dr. Gull is going to sing hymns there with the servants after tea.

LUCY.

Oh, how *darling*! Hymns on Sunday afternoon—so original!

LADY EPPING.

[*Graciously to DR. GULL.*] I shall try to come in for a verse or two, Dr. Gull.

WRAY.

We'll all come. Won't you come and sing hymns, Miss Vanderhide?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

No, thanks. I prefer croquet.

LADY EPPING.

[*To PAUL.*] While they are at their hymns you and I will begin our play.

PAUL.

[*Embarrassed.*] Oh, but ——

LADY EPPING.

[*Cheerfully.*] Yes, yes. I feel just in the mood for it.

DR. GULL.

Your leddyship wouldna' write a drama on the Sawbath?

LADY EPPING.

Why not? I must express myself when I feel in the humour, like the Judge in his legal work or you in your religious work. It's all the same.

DR. GULL.

[*Bringing his fist heavily down on the tea tray and shouting.*] The kirk is no the same as the theayter.

[*They all raise their eyebrows and look towards DR. GULL in well-bred surprise. There is silence.*]

LADY EPPING.

[*Very politely to DR. GULL.*] Dr. Gull, the servants will be waiting for you. You know which the music room is, do you not?

DR. GULL.

I thought I were in England, but I see that I'm e'en in the city of Babylon.

[*Exit DR. GULL.*]

WRAY.

[*Springing up indignantly.*] Bedlam! Did he call us Bedlam?

LADY EPPING.

Babylon.

WRAY.

Oh! Because if he'd said Bedlam I should have retaliated. I don't know what I should have said, but I should have said something.

LADY EPPING.

[*To MISS MORTIMER, who is following DR. GULL.*] You needn't go and sing hymns, Berry.

MISS MORTIMER.

Dearest one, I should like to. I want to study the servants' expressions.

[*Exit MISS MORTIMER.*]

PERRY.

[*Offering his case.*] Have a cigarette, Judge?

WRAY.

Young man, I never smoke.

[*He moves away from PERRY.*]

LADY BEACROFT.

Mr. Hughes, Mr. Hughes, do come and talk to us. [PAUL takes WRAY'S place between them.] Tell us all about first nights.

LUCY.

Do you come before the curtain and make a bow?

PAUL.

That depends upon the audience.

LADY BEACROFT.

I write plays.

PAUL.

Do you?

[*He snatches LADY BEACROFT'S cup, puts it on the table and is about to escape, when LADY EPPING speaks.*]

LADY EPPING.

Don't run away, Mr. Hughes. [*Enter two FOOTMEN to clear away the tea things.*] We are going to begin the play now. [*To JOHN.*] John, will you ask Mrs. Pitt to send me my box of plays—the large black tin box?

JOHN.

Yes, my lady.

[*Exit JOHN and the other footman.*]

LORD EPPING.

Going to write plays? Then you won't need me any more!

[*Exit LORD EPPING into the garden.*]

LADY BEACROFT.

[*To WRAY.*] Judge, Judge, are you ready to take me for a walk?

WRAY.

With pleasure, Lady Beacroft. We might take Lord Epping with us. I think some one should take a little notice of our poor host.

[Exeunt WRAY and LADY BEACROFT through the window.]

PAUL.

[To EVELYN.] Will you come for a walk with me?

EVELYN.

But *you* are going to collaborate with Lady Epping.

PAUL.

No. Let us go for a walk.

LADY EPPING.

Oswald darling, take Miss Vanderhide for a stroll.

OSWALD.

I'm going for a walk with Mrs. Hughes.

[Exeunt EVELYN and OSWALD.]

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I hadn't the slightest desire to go for a walk.

LADY EPPING.

[In a whisper to MISS VANDERHIDE.] He's only flirting with Mrs. Hughes to make you jealous.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I presume so.

LADY EPPING.

You mustn't mind.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I'm amused. Mr. Perry, would you like to play me at croquet?

PERRY.

I haven't got my croquet suit on, but if you don't mind my playing with you like this.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

Oh, you look perfectly sweet as you are.

[*Exeunt* MISS VANDERHIDE and PERRY.]

LUCY.

Oh, I'm forgetting all about the hymns. [*Putting down a magazine she has been reading.*] Do look in at us, Flora. Dr. Gull is sure to beat time with his arms and legs. So sweet! [*Exit* LUCY, R.]

LADY EPPING.

What a pity Lucy is so silly. I think she's getting worse. [*Enter* JOHN *with the box of plays which he puts on the floor and then exits.*] Put it down there on the floor. Now we can get on with our play.

PAUL.

[*In distress.*] I don't think I *can* work to-day, Lady Epping.

LADY EPPING.

[*Cheerfully.*] Oh, yes, you can, if you give your mind to it.

PAUL.

I haven't an idea in my head.

LADY EPPING.

Neither have I; but that's the advantage of collaboration. We stimulate each other. Now, let us see if there isn't something here that we could work up. [*She kneels behind the box, opens it and begins burrowing among the manuscripts. On the lid of the box a large Countess' coronet is painted in white. PAUL sits watching her. LADY EPPING reads the titles of some of her plays as she picks them out of the box and puts them back again.*] "The Insubordination of Laura," "The Tower of Babel," "Little Tummy-Sit-in-the-Pan"—that's a play for children—"Two Sins and a Woman." [*Retaining "Two Sins and a Woman."*] This is my last play—the one I told you the plot of. It's full of bright lines. Listen to this. It's the Duke of Vere's first meeting with Lady Dorincourt. The Duke aside—[*reading.*] "By gad, as fine a woman as ever I set eyes on."

[*To PAUL.*] There's quite a masculine touch about my work, isn't there? [*Reading.*] Lady Dorincourt aside—"I feel some strange mis-giving clutching at my heart-strings. If this fascinating and mysterious man has been sent to lure me away from the straight path which the world has hewn for us poor women to walk in, I fear he may be successful." [*Smiling at PAUL.*] That's the way I prepare for the dénouement. [*Reading.*] "If one will not venture, one is not likely to have." [*To PAUL.*] That's an epigram. [*PAUL nods his head. Reading.*] Lady Dorincourt. "Ah me!" The Duke of Vere, who lives half the year in Rome—"Amico mio!" [*To PAUL.*] A play upon words, you see.

PAUL.

Oh!

LADY EPPING.

I hope it is not too subtle for the British public. They can't understand anything unless you give it them straight from the shoulder. We'd better not give them this play till we've educated them up to it. [*Throwing "Two Sins and a Woman" into the box and taking out another. She reads the title.*] "The Penalty of Passion." That's so strong. I'll read you an extract from the last act. [*The "Penalty of Passion" is a serious poetic play, so* LADY

EPPING reads it with reverence, but also with dramatic emphasis, clearly portraying the merciless tyrant in Norheld's part and the hapless queen in Vaneshla's. She reads the stage directions reverently.] "Queen Vaneshla is lying on a bed of straw in the dungeon. It is midnight. Clock strikes ten. Nuns are heard singing Mass in the distance. Enter King Norheld.

"Is that the queen who lies so very still?
Is that Vaneshla, once my bride so fair?
Dost thou not hear me? 'Tis King Norheld
speaks.
Hast lost thy tongue—you saucy baggage you?"

[Reading stage direction.] Drags Vaneshla round dungeon by hair of head." [Explaining to PAUL.] Of course she'll have to wear a wig. [Continuing the reading of Vaneshla's part.]

"Oh, spare me, sire! Oh, spare thy hapless queen!
Vaneshla weeps. Vaneshla loves her lord:
Can innocence and beauty wed with sin?"

[LADY EPPING becomes so moved by the pathos of the scene that tears choke her utterance.] That's so touching, isn't it? [PAUL laughs stupidly. Her eyes fall on a farce called "Clapham Flats." She screams with laughter,

throws "*The Penalty of Passion*" into the box, and takes out "*Clapham Flats*" screaming with laughter as she says.] Oh, "*Clapham Flats*!" Such a funny farce! I must read you one passage. They push the cook into the boiler, and the cook says — [*She breaks into fresh peals of laughter, then calms herself enough to say.*] The cook says — [*Fresh peals of laughter. She gives the manuscript to PAUL, showing him the place to read, then staggers towards the window in fits of uncontrollable laughter. PAUL reads the manuscript without smiling. When LADY EPPING has recovered her composure she wipes her eyes and comes back to him, speaking in the husky voice one is left with after such laughter.*] Oh, dear, I'd forgotten "*Clapham Flats*" was so fun-ny. [*She watches PAUL reading the manuscript before she says.*] You are not laughing at all, and I thought you had such a sense of humour.

PAUL.

Let me put them away.

[*He gets the box and puts it upon a chair.*]

LADY EPPING.

Now! You've seen several examples of my work. I want your candid opinion.

PAUL.

[*Embarrassed.*] It's full of clever things.

LADY EPPING.

[*Smiling.*] I thought you'd like it.

PAUL.

But I should say—on the whole—it is scarcely up to the necessary standard.

LADY EPPING.

Oh, I don't agree with you. Look at the stuff they put on the stage.

PAUL.

[*Turning over "Clapham Flats."*] You see the play is so short.

LADY EPPING.

That's an advantage. Every one will come in time if we begin late enough.

PAUL.

And then again —

LADY EPPING.

[*Taking the manuscript from PAUL and hugging it.*] I'm sorry you don't like my work.
[*Turning the pages.*] I did think you'd be able to see something in it, but you do nothing but pick it to pieces.

PAUL.

It seems to me you are wasting yourself on literature. You have so many brilliant gifts.

LADY EPPING.

[*Very pleased, she turns to PAUL smilingly.*]
Tell me what you think my best points are.

PAUL.

[*Embarrassed.*] I hardly like to.

LADY EPPING.

Oh, why? Friends should always be candid.

PAUL.

[*Smiling at her.*] Friends!

[*He leans towards LADY EPPING and puts his hand near hers.*]

LADY EPPING.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*] You mustn't get silly about me. Now! What shall our play be about?

PAUL.

[*With the husky voice of pretended passion.*]
I can't think of work when I'm near you.

[*He folds his arms and looks at LADY EPPING through half-closed eyes.*]

LADY EPPING.

[*Sentimentally.*] I'm sorry. I hoped we should be able to work sensibly together.

PAUL.

[*Ardently.*] I can't work sensibly with you.
[*He seizes LADY EPPING in his arms.*]

[*Enter EVELYN quickly from the garden.*
She hurries forward.

LADY EPPING.

[*Escaping from PAUL's embrace.*] Mr. Hughes, you forget where you are.

EVELYN.

[*In horror.*] Paul!

LADY EPPING.

Oh! [*Speaking and gesticulating in an intensely melodramatic fashion.*] Lost! Lost! A lost woman forevermore. [*Turns to EVELYN smiling pleasantly.*] We are rehearsing our play.

[*She strolls into the garden.*

EVELYN.

[*To PAUL.*] Show me the manuscript. [PAUL picks up the manuscript of "*Clapham Flats.*"] Show me the place where it says "Lost, lost, a lost woman forevermore." [PAUL turns the pages in agitation.] There isn't such a line, is there?

PAUL.

There may be. I shouldn't be at all surprised.

EVELYN.

[*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Paul! I didn't think you'd do that.

PAUL.

Evelyn, let me explain.

EVELYN.

You had her in your arms.

PAUL.

In a way.

EVELYN.

You were making love to her.

PAUL.

In a way.

EVELYN.

Well—how are you going to explain that?

PAUL.

This way; she would try and collaborate with me, so—to keep her mind off it—I began to make love to her. It was the only thing to do.

EVELYN.

[*With decision.*] We must leave this house at once.

PAUL.

Oh, my dear. That's impossible.

EVELYN.

I'm going, if you aren't.

PAUL.

There's nothing in it. She's a little flattered. That's all. You don't think I'm *really* in love with her!

EVELYN.

That's not the point. The point is this; I've been out for a walk with Lord Oswald Bruce-Bannerman, and he kissed me.

PAUL.

The brute! I'll wring his neck.

[LADY EPPING *appears again at the window.*

EVELYN.

Shall we leave at once?

PAUL.

Yes. You shan't stay here another minute. Lady Epping! [LADY EPPING *steps into the room. She is very dignified and gracious.*] My wife and I are so very sorry, but we must say good-bye.

LADY EPPING.

[*Raising her eyebrows slightly.*] Oh!

EVELYN.

At once.

PAUL.

We thank you very much for asking us here.

EVELYN.

Good-bye.

PAUL.

[*Offering his hand.*] Good-bye.

LADY EPPING.

This is rather sudden. You have not told me why you must go.

PAUL.

[*Embarrassed.*] I—I think I'd better not.

LADY EPPING.

Oh—but don't you think you should?

EVELYN.

We can't.

LADY EPPING.

But I shall be afraid that we have unintentionally offended you. I think it would be kinder if you explained your hurried departure.

[PAUL *hesitates and looks at* EVELYN.]

EVELYN.

You explain while I pack. [She goes out.]

LADY EPPING.

Did your wife observe your indiscretion?

PAUL.

Yes.

LADY EPPING.

And believe *my* explanation?

PAUL.

No!

LADY EPPING.

That is the reason you are—running away?

PAUL.

One of the reasons.

LADY EPPING.

It doesn't seem to have entered your head to consider me.

PAUL.

You ?

LADY EPPING.

She'll go and tell everybody why she left the house. Because she found her husband making love to Lady Epping. Don't you see—don't you see what a position you have placed me in ?

PAUL.

I'm very sorry.

LADY EPPING.

Sorry ! That won't do at all.

PAUL.

Is Lord Epping a jealous man ? [LADY EPPING raises her eyebrows and stares at PAUL, until he becomes ashamed of having asked the question.] I beg your pardon ! I wonder what we had better do ?

LADY EPPING.

I don't. I know. You will have the goodness to go to your wife and to tell her that you have committed a very great breach of propri-

ety. You will say that you lost your head—or whatever you like—and that I was very much surprised. You will tell her that you apologized to me and that I have so far overlooked your behaviour as to ask you to continue your visit until to-morrow morning when it terminates naturally. And you will forbid her to say anything about what she saw—if you please.

[Enter EVELYN.

EVELYN.

Aren't you coming, Paul?

LADY EPPING.

[Smiling.] Now I must go and look after my other guests.

[She goes up leisurely and strolls off into the garden.

EVELYN.

Are you ready?

PAUL.

[Thoughtfully.] Evelyn—if we go at once—it'll look so funny. I was only *pretending* to make love to Lady Epping, and of course she was quite above lending herself to anything of the sort.

EVELYN.

[Maliciously.] Yes, I saw she didn't like it.

PAUL.

She has treated the matter as a woman of the world would, told me not to be so silly, and asked us to stay on.

EVELYN.

What about Lord Oswald kissing *me*?

PAUL.

Let it be a lesson to you. Don't let your unsophistication lead you into any such mistake again.

EVELYN.

My mistake was telling you. That's where my unsophistication came in.

PAUL.

[*Shocked.*] Evelyn! You surprise me!

EVELYN.

You can't have everything, Paul. You can consider Lady Epping first or you can consider me first—whichever you like.

PAUL.

I think we must stay.

EVELYN.

[*Airily.*] Very well; and if that wicked attractive Lord Oswald begins any more of his nonsense—

PAUL.

[*Losing his temper.*] Evelyn!

EVELYN.

[*Airily.*] I shall know what to do.

PAUL.

You are only doing this to exasperate me, but I'm not the least exasperated, and I wish you wouldn't do it. [*He looks very glum.*]

EVELYN.

[*Flippantly to cover her annoyance.*] Seriously, Paul, I think you are mighty sensible to stay on. We should look so very unsophisticated if we ran away. Of course it will be embarrassing for you after making such an unspeakable faux pas—making love to Lady Epping in front of all those windows. Oh, Paul—you really must learn better. We went behind a shed.

PAUL.

[*Indignantly.*] Stop it!

[*LADY EPPING and OSWALD are seen coming up the garden.*]

EVELYN.

There's Lady Epping with Lord Oswald. She has forgiven you—well—I must forgive him.

[LADY EPPING *enters the room.* OSWALD *remains at the window.*

LADY EPPING.

I've just been through three of the croquet hoops and had a hymn with Dr. Gull, and here I am.

EVELYN.

I will leave you to talk to my husband, Lady Epping. Will you walk with me to the lake, Lord Oswald?

OSWALD.

Certainly ; haven't you seen the lake?

EVELYN.

[*Kissing her finger tips to PAUL.*] Bye bye, Paul. [*Exeunt EVELYN and OSWALD.*

LADY EPPING.

Well—is it all right now? Are you staying?

PAUL.

Yes, thank you, Lady Epping—until tomorrow.

LADY EPPING.

[*Graciously.*] And now—remember what I told you—don't get silly about me.

PAUL.

No, Lady Epping.

LADY EPPING.

Not too silly.

PAUL.

[*Giving one gasp of surprise before he says.*]
I—I apologize.

LADY EPPING.

I ought to be angry with you, but—[*offering her hand to PAUL*] let us be friends.

PAUL.

[*Grasping it.*] Thank you.

LADY EPPING.

[*Looking down at their clasped hands, she says coquettishly.*] You are hurting my hand.

PAUL.

[*Embarrassed.*] I beg your pardon.
[*He releases her hand.*]

LADY EPPING.

[*Watching him, smiling, then saying gravely.*] I don't want you to feel I'm displeased with you. [*She again holds out her hand.*] Friends?

PAUL.

[*Taking her hand, smiling, as he says.*] Friends.

LADY EPPING.

[*Looking down at their clasped hands.*] Yes. That's better. [*Sentimentally.*] I wonder whether a man and a woman really can be—friends?

PAUL.

Why not?

LADY EPPING.

After a man has spoken to a woman as you have spoken to me?

PAUL.

[*Troubled.*] Please forget my indiscretion, Lady Epping.

[*He attempts to move away, but she draws him back.*]

LADY EPPING.

That's it. She can't *quite* forget. The situation isn't quite the same. But I hope we shall be friends, or—[*smiling coquettishly at him*] just a little more?

PAUL.

[*Embarrassed.*] Oh—yes.

LADY EPPING.

A very little more. [*She drops PAUL's hand and glances at the windows.*] We mustn't be too long alone together. [*She goes to the window then turns to say to him.*] A little more than friends.

[*She nods and smiles at PAUL, then goes out.* PAUL stands gaping.

PAUL.

Oh, lor !

[*He sinks down on a chair.*

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE.—*The library of the Eppings' house in Berkeley Square. The furniture and hangings are handsome and sombre.*

It is in the middle of the afternoon of a day at the end of September, a few weeks later than the first act.

LORD EPPING *is lying on the sofa fast asleep. Enter HENRY, a footman. HENRY is followed by LADY LUCY LISTER and MISS VANDERHIDE. LORD EPPING wakes with a start, rubs his eyes and rises. HENRY goes out.*

LUCY.

Epping! I do believe you were fast asleep.
[LORD EPPING *shakes hands with LUCY, then with MISS VANDERHIDE.*

LORD EPPING.

I was. I travelled from Scotland last night with my wife. How are you?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

Well, thank you.

LUCY.

Flora *said* you would be home to-day and on my way here I met Miss Vanderhide *shopping* in *Bond* Street—so I *made* her come with me.

LORD EPPING.

I'm sorry this is the only room that's fit to sit in, but half the house is shut up still. We are not supposed to be in London yet.

LUCY.

We don't mind.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I suppose you had a perfectly lovely time in Scotland.

LORD EPPING.

It was all right. We've been staying at Cookie Castle with the Duke—my wife's father. My wife got up some theatricals. She had that man—what's his name—the one who wrote "Glass Houses" to help her.

LUCY.

Mr. Hughes.

LORD EPPING.

Yes—nice fellow—do you know him?

LUCY.

Of *course*. I met him at Epping House, just before we all left London.

LORD EPPING.

Oh, did you? I can't remember half the people we have there. Such conglomerations as Flora gathers about her every Saturday to Monday!

MISS VANDERHIDE.

[*Pointedly.*] Was *Mrs.* Hughes in Scotland too?

LORD EPPING.

[*Carelessly.*] No—he came without her.

[*Yawns.*]

LUCY.

[*To* MISS VANDERHIDE *behind* LORD EPPING'S *back.*] What did I *tell* you?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

It's a scandal.

LORD EPPING.

[*Having recovered from his yawn, and turning to them.*] I beg your pardon. I didn't have a wink of sleep all night.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

You *look* exhausted.

LORD EPPING.

Simply dead beat.

LUCY.

I can sleep beautifully in the train.

LORD EPPING.

So can I. But about midnight Flora thought of a plot for a play—something about a foreign princess who wants to marry an Englishman but for state reasons she can't. They all had red hair and lived in a made-up place called Puritania. So tiresome when you want to go to sleep.

LUCY.

Poor Epping—and poor Flora. She must be more exhausted still.

[Enter LADY EPPING, gaily and vigorously. She is in her outdoor clothes.]

LADY EPPING.

Well, dears, have you been waiting for me a very long time? I've had such a busy afternoon. How are you, Ollie? *[Kissing her.]* Handsomer than ever. I've been to Peckham — *[Kissing LUCY.]* Well, Lucy darling. What a sweetly pretty hat!—to open some baths. A most interesting ceremony. I made a speech. *[To LORD EPPING.]* You

ought to have been there to hear the compliments the Mayor paid me. [LORD EPPING, *his eyes closed, nods his head and moans. She addresses the others.*] Has he been telling you what a splendid time we had in Scotland? All the children fell ill together and *I* nursed them. We shot all day and played no end of hockey, and had the most amusing rehearsals for our theatricals. *I* played the leading part.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

Did Mr. Hughes play the lover?

LADY EPPING.

Oh, I see. Epping has told you all about it. [*She sits at a desk. LUCY and MISS VANDERHIDE nod their heads knowingly to each other.*] I must write a few letters, but I can talk at the same time.

[*She writes very fast. LORD EPPING, his eyes still closed, stumbles in his sleep. LUCY looks at him.*

LUCY.

Did you see him going to sleep standing up? How *sweet*!

LORD EPPING.

I really think I must go and lie down.

LADY EPPING.

Poor old thing ! [*Exit* LORD EPPING. *As she writes.*] Gossip away, darlings. Tell me all the news.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

[*Solemnly.*] I'm going back to Amurica to-morrer.

LADY EPPING.

Tired of us, Ollie ?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I don't object to England—though of course it's not Parus—but I've practically made up my mind to marry an Amurican.

LADY EPPING.

[*Stops writing and says in dismay.*] Oh !
[*Graciously.*] I hope you will be very happy.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I've not settled on him yet.

LADY EPPING.

Ah !

LUCY.

But you've made up your mind to go back ?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I shall come over sometimes for Ascut, or Cowes.

LUCY.

With your American husband ?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

We generally leave them behind.

[LADY EPPING *rises*.

LUCY.

May *I* write a letter ?

LADY EPPING.

Of course.

LUCY.

[*Taking* LADY EPPING'S *place*.] Thank you *so* much. I forgot *all* about it before I came, and it's *so* important.

LADY EPPING.

Oh, Lucy, I'm sure you could never have anything important to write.

LUCY.

Oh, Flora !

LADY EPPING.

Come over here, Ollie, so that we shan't disturb Lucy. [LUCY *writes her letter* and MISS VANDERHIDE *joins* LADY EPPING *the other side of the room*.] What makes you want to go back to America ?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

Patriotism.

LADY EPPING.

How can you feel patriotic about a great big country like that? Who's the man?

MISS VANDERHIDE.

What man?

LADY EPPING.

Do you know, dear, I once had an idea you cared for my brother.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

Lord Oswald?

LADY EPPING.

He's devoted to *you*.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

His may be the English way of showing it. It certainly isn't the American. It's bad enough to have your *husband* flirting with a married woman, or your fiancé, but to have a man going on like that before he's even engaged to you! English girls put up with anything, but *we* don't!

LADY EPPING.

I admit Oswald did wrong to flirt with Mrs. Hughes—but forgive his past.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

It's his present I'm so mad about.

LADY EPPING.

The present soon becomes the past.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

If you know a man's past you can bet on his future.

LADY EPPING.

His future takes a turn on his wedding day. Oswald would make a splendid husband. He has neither brain nor will, and he can be *so* attentive to a woman. You saw that.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I've taken my passage now. And if I'm to sail tomorrer, I must hurry back to superintend my packing.

LADY EPPING.

See Oswald when he calls.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I've no expectation of such a call.

LADY EPPING.

He shall call at six o'clock.

[MISS VANDERHIDE *going to* LUCY,
shakes hands with her.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

Au revoir. [LUCY *replies*. MISS VANDERHIDE *returns to* LADY EPPING.] Au revoir.

LADY EPPING.

Six o'clock.

MISS VANDERHIDE.

I shan't be there at six. Make it six-fifteen.
[*Exit* MISS VANDERHIDE.]

LADY EPPING.

We mustn't let her go back to America. She's far too rich—far too nice. [*Enter* OSWALD.] Oswald!

OSWALD.

Hullo, Flora!

LADY EPPING.

I didn't know *you* were in the house.

OSWALD.

[*Shaking hands with* LUCY.] How are you, Lucy? [*To* LADY EPPING.] I've been looking for Epping.

LADY EPPING.

He's resting after his journey,—poor old thing. Stay and talk to me.

OSWALD.

All right.

LADY EPPING.

[*To LUCY, tactfully.*] Now, Lucy darling, I mustn't keep you here any longer. I know you have no end of things to do.

LUCY.

[*Getting up and going.*] Very well, I'll go, but ——— [*She glances at OSWALD, then whispers to LADY EPPING.*] Do tell me how it turns out. I heard all you said to Miss Vanderhide. [*Exit LUCY.*]

LADY EPPING.

[*LADY EPPING sits on a sofa and puts her feet up, then turns to OSWALD.*] I must take my rest while I'm talking to you. Ollie Vanderhide is at Claridge's, and she's going back to America to-morrow unless you stop her.

OSWALD.

Then I suppose she'll go.

LADY EPPING.

Don't let her. You'll never get another chance like Ollie—beautiful and rich, and ready to put up with you.

OSWALD.

Did you say Claridge's?

LADY EPPING.

I think you might possibly catch her there about six-fifteen.

OSWALD.

All right.

LADY EPPING.

But mind, Oswald—if you *do* become engaged to Ollie Vanderhide—no more flirting with Mrs. Hughes.

OSWALD.

We're not flirting now. We're good friends. I'm sorry for the little woman.

LADY EPPING.

Sorry for her? Why?

OSWALD.

You know why.

LADY EPPING.

Don't be impertinent.

OSWALD.

Look here, Flora, I may as well tell you. People are beginning to gossip about you and—*you* know.

LADY EPPING.

I don't know who you mean, but surely a woman in my position may take an interest in a rising author without —

OSWALD.

It's chiefly because you had him to stay when you went home.

LADY EPPING.

As one of a large party.

OSWALD.

Without his wife.

LADY EPPING.

What a very middle-class objection!

OSWALD.

Well—I've warned you, and I advise you not to have him here too much.

LADY EPPING.

It is most unlikely that he will come here at all. [Enter HENRY.]

HENRY.

Is your ladyship at home to Mr. Paul Hughes?

LADY EPPING.

Oh! [*A pause.*] Yes.

[*Exit* HENRY. OSWALD *laughs.* LADY EPPING *stares at him.*

OSWALD.

[*Laughing.*] I can't help it, Flora, it's so funny! I'm off to Claridge's—I hope you'll enjoy yourself.

[*Exit* OSWALD. *Enter* HENRY showing in PAUL.

PAUL.

I got your note asking me to come.

LADY EPPING.

Sh! [*To* HENRY.] Henry—if any one calls I am not at home.

HENRY.

Thank you, my lady.

LADY EPPING.

Don't forget.

HENRY.

No, my lady.

[*Exit* HENRY.

LADY EPPING.

He's new. How glum you look.

PAUL.

[*Sighing.*] No wonder.

LADY EPPING.

[*Archly.*] Just because he hasn't seen me for two whole days?

PAUL.

Partly that.

LADY EPPING.

[*Pretending to be offended.*] Partly ?

PAUL.

Mostly, but—I don't know what to do about it.

LADY EPPING.

What's the matter ?

PAUL.

Everything. Lady Epping —

LADY EPPING.

I told you you might call me Flora when we are by ourselves.

PAUL.

Flora—I'm an ape !

LADY EPPING.

Oh, you funny boy. You must put that in one of your plays.

PAUL.

[*Earnestly.*] Yes. I am an *ape*, but it's not funny—not for *me*. Ever since I came back from Scotland my wife won't speak to me.

LADY EPPING.

[*Seriously concerned, says quickly.*] Oh—oh—now I'm not going to have a scandal.

PAUL.

She's taken all my photographs out of their frames and got one of your brother perched on her desk—where *I* used to be. It's disgraceful the way those two are carrying on. They've been to Earl's Court together.

LADY EPPING.

[*Busy with her own thoughts.*] But didn't you explain to your wife that you simply came to Scotland to assist me with my theatricals?

PAUL.

I thought I was a guest.

LADY EPPING.

Of course you were—don't be so silly. But she ought to understand that with two dramatists it's different. We've got an excuse.

PAUL.

Look here, Flora——

LADY EPPING.

Don't raise your voice. I hear that people are talking about us.

PAUL.

Then we must see less of each other.

LADY EPPING.

Or be more careful.

PAUL.

There's bound to be talk if we keep on.

LADY EPPING.

Nothing to what there will be if we suddenly leave off.

PAUL.

[*Advancing to her.*] I am going to be one of two things—I'll either be a good husband ——

LADY EPPING.

I don't think it's in very good taste of you to say that to me.

PAUL.

I'll either be a good husband or else I'll be a gay Lothario,—a danger—a menace to your domestic happiness. I must see Lord Epping livid with jealousy and the Duke running down from Cookie Castle to implore you to give me up. As I pass up Piccadilly I must see men-about-town nudging each other at club windows, as much as to say, "That's *him*."

That's the young devil Lady Epping is breaking her heart about." I'll have that or I'll have a well-ordered home. It's for you to choose, but I'm going to be something definite.

LADY EPPING.

[*With emotion. Going to PAUL and laying her hand on his arm.*] If we could let ourselves go—but it wouldn't be right. [PAUL attempts to kiss LADY EPPING. *She steps back hastily.*] Prenez garde!

PAUL.

[*Angrily.*] There—you see! *You* don't want to kiss *me*. You want *me* to want to kiss *you*, and you not let me. I've had enough of this one-sided game, so there's nothing else for it but for me to go home and be a good husband. [*He is going to the door.*]

LADY EPPING.

[*Following.*] Ah, no, no—not that! I mean—don't go away in anger.

PAUL.

[*Coming back to her.*] Flora, I'm convinced you don't care a rap about me. Any fool would do as well to dance attendance.

LADY EPPING.

Oh, cruel—cruel! Perhaps I *am* too well regulated, but then—I'm such a busy woman—

I haven't time to go searching my heart all day. It takes a thoroughly *idle* woman to be sentimental. But, oh, Paul! [*She begins to cry.*] Now I'm making myself cry—and suppose any one came in. How dreadful that would be. Wait here while I run up to my room and dab something on. Then we'll have a nice cozy chat like we used to do in Scotland.

[*Exit* LADY EPPING. PAUL *marches over to the fireplace moodily.* Enter HENRY.

HENRY.

Mrs. Paul Hughes.

[*Exit* HENRY. Enter EVELYN. *They stare at each other embarrassed, and surprised, before they speak.*

EVELYN.

[*As if they were the merest acquaintances.*]
How d'you do, Paul?

PAUL.

Evelyn! [*Trying to appear at ease.*] Have you come to call on Lady Epping?

EVELYN.

Yes. And you?

PAUL.

Yes; after staying there, you know. I thought it better to call. [*A silence.*

EVELYN.

Yes. What an ideal September day it is.

PAUL.

Is it ?

EVELYN.

Yes. It's beginning to rain.

PAUL.

I'll have a look.

[PAUL goes to the window. As he moves he surreptitiously returns the chair he sat in near LADY EPPING to its original place.]

EVELYN.

I should leave the furniture as it is if you want to look as if nothing had happened.

PAUL.

[Indignantly.] We never sat in those chairs.

EVELYN.

Of course not. There's a sofa.

PAUL.

[With dignity.] I think you forget what Lady Epping's position is.

EVELYN.

I don't know what it is, but I suppose it was on the sofa.

PAUL.

Evelyn—what have you come here for?

EVELYN.

To see Lady Epping.

PAUL.

To—to have it out with her?

EVELYN.

Have what out, Paul?

PAUL.

I don't know, but there's a gleam in your eye that I don't like. I hope you are going to be polite to Lady Epping.

EVELYN.

That was my intention—till I found you here. Now—now—I don't know that I can answer for myself.

PAUL.

You're not going to fight about me?

EVELYN.

That depends on Lady Epping.

PAUL.

But think what a ridiculous figure *I* should cut standing here between you.

EVELYN.

Then you'd better go.

PAUL.

I shan't budge.

LADY EPPING.

[*Heard outside.*] Are you there?

EVELYN.

[*Calling back.*] Yes, I'm here.

[PAUL looks about him in alarm ; then, feeling unequal to the situation darts out of the room. Enter LADY EPPING. She is surprised to find EVELYN where she left PAUL, but her composure is perfect. She advances graciously to EVELYN and shakes hands.]

LADY EPPING.

How kind of you to come and see me the first day I am in London. Do sit down.

[EVELYN sits.]

EVELYN.

[*Seriously.*] You take a great interest in my husband, don't you, Lady Epping?

LADY EPPING.

[*Graciously.*] I think his work is charming.

EVELYN.

Before Paul became famous and had his head turned we were like two sweethearts.

LADY EPPING.

Indeed.

EVELYN.

[*Resentfully.*] Don't you think it's a great shame for a married woman to come between two sweethearts?

LADY EPPING.

[*Seriously.*] Yes, I do. I have wished to speak to you on this matter for some time but I felt delicate about it. However—since *you* have introduced the subject—Mrs. Hughes, let me counsel you—as an elder woman may a younger—leave him alone.

EVELYN.

[*Surprised.*] My husband?

LADY EPPING.

My brother.

EVELYN.

Oh!

LADY EPPING.

Your conscience pricks you, so you have come to tell me.

EVELYN.

No.

LADY EPPING.

Don't try to check your better feelings. You are sorry—because, as you said just now, you have come between two sweethearts.

EVELYN.

It's *you*.

LADY EPPING.

Don't be rude, please. See, I am not angry with you. I dare say you meant no harm.

EVELYN.

[*Clenching her fists in inarticulate rage.*] Oh! Oh, oh!

LADY EPPING.

[*Going to her.*] There, there. Have a good cry. It will do you good.

EVELYN.

We are not talking about *me and Lord Oswald* and Miss Vanderhide. We are talking about *you and me and Paul!*

LADY EPPING.

I suppose you think it very clever of you to turn it off in this way.

EVELYN.

I'm not turning it off—you are!

LADY EPPING.

I begin to fear your guilt is greater than I had supposed.

EVELYN.

Oh!

LADY EPPING.

Or you wouldn't lose your self-control in this way. Try and tell me all about it quietly, and we'll see if we can't get you out of the scrape without letting your husband know.

EVELYN.

Oh, you are a wicked woman. You know quite well I'm in the right and you are in the wrong—but you're so sharp——

LADY EPPING.

This is impossible. [*She rings the bell.*]

EVELYN.

Call the servants,—turn me out, but I'll get even with you yet—you hard-hearted husband stealer. [*Exit* EVELYN.]

LADY EPPING.

Insolence! [*Enter* HENRY.]

HENRY.

If you please, my lady, are you at home to Miss Berengaria Mortimer?

LADY EPPING.

Henry, why, when I distinctly told you I was not at home to any one, did you admit Mrs. Hughes?

HENRY.

Well, you see, my lady, she bore the same name as the gentleman who was with you, so I thought she must be his wife.

LADY EPPING.

Well?

HENRY.

I knew if she was his wife it was all right to let her in.

LADY EPPING.

Really, Henry, you are a very stupid boy. Tell Mr. Buck to give you notice at once.

HENRY.

[*Respectfully.*] Thank you, my lady.

LADY EPPING.

[*Screams out.*] Berry!

[*Enter* MISS MORTIMER. *Exit* HENRY.]

MISS MORTIMER.

Darling one, I heard of your return, so I rushed in to tell you the news.

LADY EPPING.

Yes, dear, but I want your advice first. *You* are an actress. *You* ought to know all about the emotions.

MISS MORTIMER.

I *live* on emotion.

LADY EPPING.

Suppose a married woman had had a flirtation—with a young married man.

MISS MORTIMER.

[*With great interest.*] Oh !

LADY EPPING.

It's for a play.

MISS MORTIMER.

Oh ! Can you get that past the Censor ?

LADY EPPING.

It was only a flirtation. After a time he left her vowing never to return.

MISS MORTIMER.

Very sensible of him.

LADY EPPING.

Yes, but of course that didn't suit *her*.

MISS MORTIMER.

Oh, I see—*that* kind of a woman.

LADY EPPING.

Not at all—but naturally she's not going to let him throw *her* over. She's going to throw him over.

MISS MORTIMER.

Naturally.

LADY EPPING.

So she has to see him once more. How is she to get him to come?

MISS MORTIMER.

I should throw myself at his feet and crave a tryst.

LADY EPPING.

I want sense, not sentiment. Would she make an appeal? Say, send him a letter that was a little stronger than usual?

MISS MORTIMER.

I should think she would.

LADY EPPING.

Would that bring him?

MISS MORTIMER.

I should think it would.

LADY EPPING.

That's what I should think. Will you excuse me if I write a note? I want to scribble a line to my sister.

MISS MORTIMER.

Certainly, darling one.

[LADY EPPING *sits at the writing table.*

LADY EPPING.

"My dear boy. I'm sorry I was cold—[*she crosses out "cold" and writes*] unkind this afternoon. Come in soon and be forgiven. This evening I am going to the play with my husband, but at a quarter to ten I will have a severe headache and leave the theatre alone. Call at ten and let us make it up. Yours, F. E." [*She puts the letter in an envelope.*] "Paul Hughes, Esquire."

[*She rings the bell and seals the envelope.*

MISS MORTIMER.

What is the play?

LADY EPPING.

Only a situation I am working out to please myself. I don't think it will ever be published, at least I hope not. [*Enter HENRY.*] Take this letter.

HENRY.

Yes, my lady. Is there any answer?

LADY EPPING.

You can wait—and see if there's an answer.

HENRY.

Thank you, my lady. [*He exits.*]

LADY EPPING.

Now tell me your news.

MISS MORTIMER.

I begin rehearsals of my new play to-morrow.

LADY EPPING.

Oh, really—who is it by?

MISS MORTIMER.

Paul Hughes.

LADY EPPING.

How funny—why, you met him at *my* house.

MISS MORTIMER.

Yes, my own angel, but ——

LADY EPPING.

And you have eight, if not nine, of *my* plays under consideration.

MISS MORTIMER.

I know it, precious one,—and I should be producing them all now, one after another, if I

had my way, but my stupid manager has already signed with Paul Hughes.

LADY EPPING.

What is *his* play about?

MISS MORTIMER.

I swore on my honour not to tell, but it won't do any harm to tell *you*. I'm a wife and my husband neglects me for his business, so I flirt with another man. That's the first two acts.

LADY EPPING.

[*Indignantly.*] Oh! [*She recovers herself.*]
Go on.

MISS MORTIMER.

The third act is where I get my great chance. I visit my lover late at night and then my husband comes, so I hide behind a curtain.

LADY EPPING.

[*Breathlessly.*] And the end?

MISS MORTIMER.

I go to the colonies.

LADY EPPING.

But *that* is the plot of "Two Sins and a Woman."

MISS MORTIMER.

It is the plot of nearly all the plays I ever acted in.

LADY EPPING.

I told him that plot at Epping House. You can't produce it, Berry. I shall apply for an injunction.

MISS MORTIMER.

That would advertise us nicely.

LADY EPPING.

Who's your manager?

MISS MORTIMER.

Mr. Brooks.

LADY EPPING.

I shall go and read my play to this Mr. Brooks to-morrow morning. [*She paces about the room.*] Oh, I can prove my case up to the hilt. Is he a person one can ask to luncheon?

MISS MORTIMER.

Who?

LADY EPPING.

This Mr. Banks—your manager.

MISS MORTIMER.

Mr. Brooks.

LADY EPPING.

He can come to tea anyway. I *am* disappointed in Mr. Hughes. I *did* think that at last I had found a genius who was a gentleman. Where is he to be found?

MISS MORTIMER.

Who?

LADY EPPING.

This Mr. Rivers—your manager.

MISS MORTIMER.

Mr. Brooks. He is generally to be found at the Trafalgar Theatre.

LADY EPPING.

I shall go and interview him first thing to-morrow morning. I shall say "Mr. Waters"—

MISS MORTIMER.

Mr. Brooks.

LADY EPPING.

Oh! there was Vaneshla—the finest tragic part ever written—and I was willing to turn it into a comedy part to suit *you*. There was Lady Dorincourt—an exceptional opportunity for *dress*. She has a scene in which she tries on hats. You could have had the

stage strewn with Paris models. But no—no—you prefer to take a play by Mr. Hughes—a man you met through me. I consider that you have behaved in a most scandalous manner, and I only keep silent because I am in my own house.

MISS MORTIMER.

Don't stop, dear one. I am making a study of you. I have a great scene of indignation in the third act and I wasn't sure how to take it [LADY EPPING *gives an exclamation of anger*], but now I know. [She rises and goes to the door.] Good-bye, darling one, and thanks so much.

LADY EPPING.

[*With artificial graciousness.*] Good-bye, Miss Mortimer. [*Exit* MISS MORTIMER. *Enter* LORD EPPING *by the other door.*] Oh, Epping!

LORD EPPING.

Flora, why aren't you resting?

LADY EPPING.

Oh, yes, I mustn't neglect my health. [She sits on the sofa and puts her feet up.] Oh, Epping, I've just received such a crushing blow. Sit down. [LORD EPPING sits.] Berry Mortimer is going to produce a play by Mr. Hughes, and it's *my* play. They've stolen it.

LORD EPPING.

Good gracious !

LADY EPPING.

I shall go to law.

LORD EPPING.

No, Flora.

LADY EPPING.

Am I to lie down and let them trample on me ?

LORD EPPING.

You really can't go to law with these people.

LADY EPPING.

They deserve to be shown up.

LORD EPPING.

I wish you'd give up writing plays. It's not fit work for a woman in *your* position.

LADY EPPING.

Genius is not only to be found in low places. I consider it a possession of which *any* woman might be proud.

LORD EPPING.

I know genius is not looked down upon as it used to be, and I don't think it ought to be, but I'm getting tired of the way we run after celeb-

rities and turn Epping House into a Zoo every Saturday to Monday.

LADY EPPING.

It is my pride that every shade of thought is represented at Epping House.

LORD EPPING.

I don't object to *clever* people, but some of the people you get down there are just as stupid as our own relations. It's all very well for *you*. *You* amuse yourself with the wits, but *I* get left with the bores. I've had enough of them. Things have got to be changed, and this is a good place to begin. Let them steal your play and make that a reason for cutting the whole gang. It's no use trying to shine at everything. You'll only get neuritis.

LADY EPPING.

[*With quiet decision.*] I shall go to law.

LORD EPPING.

I shan't pay your costs.

[*Enter OSWALD quickly with a smiling face.*]

OSWALD.

I say, I've made it all right. [*To LADY EPPING.*] We are going to be married on the tenth of November at St. Peter's, Eaton Square.

LADY EPPING.

I congratulate you, dear boy, but oh, Oswald! I am face to face with a grave crisis. My reputation is in jeopardy.

OSWALD.

[*Pointedly.*] What did I tell you?

LADY EPPING.

My literary reputation. After thinking everything over very carefully from every point of view, I have at last decided to go to law. Epping refuses to pay my costs. To whom then can I turn but to you?

OSWALD.

Oh! How much will the costs be?

LADY EPPING.

I must have first rate counsel. That may mean thousands of pounds.

OSWALD.

You *know* I only have five hundred a year.

LADY EPPING.

You *had*. But on November the tenth you are to marry an American heiress.

OSWALD.

We are only engaged yet.

LADY EPPING.

My case won't come on before November.

OSWALD.

I can't ask my wife to support my relations.

LORD EPPING.

[*To* OSWALD.] I am *quite* well able to support my own wife.

LADY EPPING.

[*To* LORD EPPING.] I know you are. But you won't do it. You throw me off just when you ought to rally round me.

OSWALD.

Well, you must settle it among yourselves. I can't do anything.

[*He moves away from them.*]

LADY EPPING.

Then my jewels must go.

LORD EPPING.

Flora, you *shall not* go into court and make a fool of yourself.

LADY EPPING.

Shall not! Do you say *shall not?*

LORD EPPING.

Yes, I did, and I *mean* it.

LADY EPPING.

Which of us has made the name of Epping what it is to-day?

LORD EPPING.

I won't have my wife seeking cheap notoriety.

LADY EPPING.

I think I shall know how to conduct myself in a Court of Law.

LORD EPPING.

Nobody can be effective in a Court of Law except the Judge. You'll be fastened up in a loose box and forced to answer all sorts of questions. If you've any little secrets you don't want the world to know they'll have them all out of you.

OSWALD.

That might be rather awkward.

[*Enter* HENRY.]

HENRY.

If you please, my lady, I left your letter.

LADY EPPING.

Very well—very well. You needn't come and tell me.

HENRY.

If you please, my lady, you said I was to see if there was an answer.

LADY EPPING.

Have the answer sent to my room.

HENRY.

There isn't one, my lady; Mr. Hughes was out.

LADY EPPING.

Oh!

HENRY.

Mrs. Hughes opened the letter.

LADY EPPING.

Mrs. Hughes?

HENRY.

She said there wasn't any answer—yet.

[LADY EPPING waves him aside. *Exit*

HENRY.

OSWALD.

That sounds ominous. I say, Flora—you can't go to law with him now.

LORD EPPING.

Now! What do you mean by she can't go to law with him now?

OSWALD.

[*Floundering.*] Nothing—only—if she's written a letter to Hughes that his wife wasn't meant to see ——

LADY EPPING.

Idiot!

LORD EPPING.

Was there anything in that letter that you wouldn't like the world to know?

LADY EPPING.

Certainly not.

LORD EPPING.

Oswald—will you please leave us?

LADY EPPING.

[*Before OSWALD can do so.*] Don't go, Oswald. We've nothing to say to each other you can't hear. [*To LORD EPPING.*] I suppose you'll be telling me next that my letter to Mr. Hughes will be read out in Court. As if it would matter if it *were*—a casual note—asking him to luncheon. However—as you're both so determined I will do as you wish. I won't go to law.

LORD EPPING.

I see! You *daren't* go into Court.

LADY EPPING.

Don't be absurd !

LORD EPPING.

You're hiding something from me.

LADY EPPING.

Nothing of the sort.

LORD EPPING.

Will you *swear* it ?

LADY EPPING.

Swear ! If I'm to be sworn and cross examined I may as well go into Court at once. I must now—if it's only to vindicate my character. Oswald, ring up my solicitor.

OSWALD.

No, Flora—I won't.

LADY EPPING.

Don't, then. I'll do it myself. [*She snatches the receiver from the telephone and calls down it as the curtain falls.*] I'm going to law ! It's Lady Epping ! What number ? Oh—Holborn 123—3—1, 2, 3.

CURTAIN

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE.—*Courtroom X—King's Bench Division. The courtroom is crowded when the curtain rises.*

JUDGE WRAY *is enthroned opposite the audience. On his right hand is the vacant witness-box. In front of him and below him sits the ASSOCIATE at his desk with the USHER standing near. In front of the ASSOCIATE'S desk is the SOLICITOR'S table with LADY EPPING and her solicitor, LORD EPPING, LADY LUCY LISTER, and PAUL HUGHES and his solicitor seated round it. On the right of the witness-box and facing left are the twelve jurymen in the jury-box. Facing the jury-box are the benches where the COUNSEL sit. LADY EPPING is represented by MR. CRAVEN, K. C., and MR. HICKORY, and PAUL HUGHES by CLINTON PERRY. Besides all these people there are also present many barristers, solicitors' clerks, newspaper reporters and sketch artists, and general public. EVELYN HUGHES and MISS BERENGARIA MORTIMER are accommodated with*

chairs in front of the jury-box and on the bench on either side of the JUDGE are seated LORD OSWALD BRUCE-BANNERMAN and MISS VANDERHIDE, who has now become LADY OSWALD BRUCE-BANNERMAN, LADY BEACROFT and other smartly dressed ladies.

HICKORY.

[*Rising and saying to WRAY.*] May it please your Lordship — [The rest of the speech to the JURY.] Gentlemen of the Jury, the Countess of Epping is the Plaintiff and Mr. Paul Hughes the Defendant. The claim is to recover damages for the infringement of copyright of a play written by plaintiff and entitled "Two Sins and a Woman," and to restrain the defendant from again performing his play entitled "Smoke without Fire" which we claim is substantially a copy of the said play. The defendant has pleaded denying that "Smoke without Fire" is in any sense a copy of "Two Sins and a Woman." Upon these pleas issue is joined and these are the issues you will have to try. [*He sits down.*]

CRAVEN.

[*Rising and addressing WRAY.*] May it please your lordship — [*To the JURY.*] Gentlemen of the Jury —

WRAY.

I should like to mention here that the plaintiff is a personal friend of mine. Is there any objection to my hearing the case?

PERRY.

Not the slightest, my lord.

LADY EPPING.

On the contrary —

EVELYN.

[To MISS MORTIMER.] She is trying to fascinate the Judge now; it isn't fair.

CRAVEN.

This action is brought by the plaintiff to recover damages for the infringement of the copyright of her play "Two Sins and a Woman." The defendant is a professional dramatist, and, like other professional dramatists, is no doubt frequently hard up for a plot. We know that in such cases necessity is not always the Mother of Invention. The plaintiff herself will tell you how, on the tenth of July at Epping House—one of her ladyship's many country seats—she told the defendant the plot of her play "Two Sins and a Woman."

WRAY.

Why didn't she call it "Three Sins"?

[General laughter in which WRAY and

every one but CRAVEN and LADY EPPING join. CRAVEN looks about him impatiently till the laughter has subsided before he proceeds.

CRAVEN.

The plaintiff will also tell you how, a few minutes later, on the same day, she read extracts from the said play to the defendant, and how finally in the month of September she read him the whole of "Two Sins and a Woman," and the whole of sixteen other plays while they were both guests at Cookie Castle in Scotland.

WRAY.

I thought I had seen it stated somewhere that Lady Epping had only written fifteen plays when she went to Cookie Castle.

CRAVEN.

She wrote two more during the last week of August. [*To the JURY.*] Up to the end of the Cookie visit the relations between the plaintiff and the defendant seem to have been exceptionally—er—[*LADY EPPING clears her throat*] harmonious. It was not until September twenty-fifth that her ladyship began to suspect she had been nourishing a viper in her—er—entertaining a viper unawares. On that day the plaintiff received a call from Miss Berengaria Mortimer—[*all eyes are turned towards MISS*

MORTIMER, *who poses complacently*] the celebrated actress. Miss Berengaria Mortimer informed Lady Epping that she had been engaged by Mr. Brooks of the Trafalgar Theatre to play the principal part in Mr. Paul Hughes' play "Smoke without Fire." When Lady Epping asked Miss Berengaria Mortimer to tell her the plot of the play, Miss Berengaria Mortimer told it—in the exact words Lady Epping had used to tell the plot of "Two Sins and a Woman" to Mr. Hughes. Gentlemen, our claim is not only that the whole of the plot of "Smoke without Fire" is copied from "Two Sins and a Woman." We claim that one of the scenes is copied, the situation at the end of the third act, and two lines of the dialogue—the lines "I love you" and "I hate you." Now, gentlemen, you are doubtless aware that "Smoke without Fire" was not a success, but we claim that if "Two Sins and a Woman" had been produced in its place, it would have been a success, and that if it had been a success, Lady Epping's sixteen other plays would have been produced and would have been successes too. It will be for you to calculate what her profits ought to have been.

WRAY.

It seems to me, Mr. Craven, that would be almost as difficult to estimate as an income tax.

CRAVEN.

It is not for me, my lord, to improve upon the methods of the present Government. [*To the JURY.*] Gentlemen, I hope you will remember that the plaintiff, though a countess, is also a woman—a woman in search of justice. Divest the noble plaintiff of her rank, her wealth, her regal residences, her servants, dogs, jewels, motor cars and family plate—and picture her struggling up the ladder of Fame supported only by her pen. There I will leave her, gentlemen, and as you watch her and listen to her, remember that she suffers just what your own wives and daughters would have suffered in a similar situation: she has the same hopes and fears, difficulties and dangers, the same red blood tingling in her veins.

[*He sits down.*]

WRAY.

I always thought a countess's blood was blue.
[*General laughter in which WRAY joins.*]

HICKORY.

Lady Epping——

[*LADY EPPING enters the witness-box. Her behaviour is modest, dignified and attentive until she becomes at home. She appears unconscious of the interest she creates. The Sketch Artists set vigorously to work to draw her.*]

ASSOCIATE.

[*To* LADY EPPING *and gabbling almost incoherently.*] Take the Book in your right hand. The evidence you shall give to the court and jury, touching the matters in the question, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Kiss the Book.

[LADY EPPING *does so.*

LUCY.

[*To* LORD EPPING.] *Did* you see her kiss the Book? How *sweet!*

USHER.

Sh! Sh!

CRAVEN.

You are Flora, Teresa, Maud, Adelaide, Platt-Byng, Countess of Epping, Viscountess Epping and Baroness Epping in the United Kingdom; Baroness Leopardstown of Leopardstown in Ireland; Viscountess Peak and Baroness Clack in England and a Lady of Justice of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem—the plaintiff?

LADY EPPING.

Yes.

CRAVEN.

And you live at Epping House, Leopards-town Manor, Peak Park, Clack Court and Berkeley Square?

LADY EPPING.

Yes.

CRAVEN.

You have written a number of plays?

LADY EPPING.

Yes.

CRAVEN.

Have any of your plays been produced?

LADY EPPING.

One of my plays was produced in the ball-room at Cookie Castle last September, with myself in the principal part, supported by several friends. The ballroom was crowded with several more friends and all the indoor and outdoor servants. We had a very great success.

CRAVEN.

So that you would not consider yourself a novice in matters connected with the stage?

LADY EPPING.

Certainly not, for I have also taken part in tableaux in some of the leading London theatres.

CRAVEN.

Do you remember the tenth of July?

LADY EPPING.

Was that the day I made the acquaintance of Mr. Hughes?

CRAVEN.

[*Smiling graciously.*] I am asking you.

LADY EPPING.

Oh, then I suppose it would be, otherwise you wouldn't have asked me—yes.

CRAVEN.

What happened on the tenth of July?

LADY EPPING.

I made the acquaintance of Mr. Hughes?

CRAVEN.

Yes.

LADY EPPING.

Thank you. I thought him a very conceited young man.

WRAY.

You are not allowed to say what you thought.

LADY EPPING.

I *concluded* that he was a very conceited young man.

CRAVEN.

Yes, yes—now—do you remember the fourteenth of July?

LADY EPPING.

The fourteenth—let me see—oh, yes!
[*Brightly to WRAY.*] That was the Sunday
you spent with us!

WRAY.

[*Smiling at LADY EPPING.*] And very
much I enjoyed it.

LADY EPPING.

I'm so glad. *Do* come and see us again.

WRAY.

[*Smiling at LADY EPPING.*] M-m-m!

CRAVEN.

[*Waiting with obtrusive patience to continue.*]
My lord, am I to continue my examination?

WRAY.

Certainly, Mr. Craven, certainly.

[*He leans back in his chair and becomes
absorbed in his hands.*]

CRAVEN.

What else do you remember about the fourteenth of July?

LADY EPPING.

I came into the drawing-room just before tea
and found the two defendants —

WRAY.

[*Smilingly.*] There is only *one* defendant.

LADY EPPING.

[*To WRAY.*] He knows what I mean. [*To CRAVEN.*] I began to tell them about my plays.

CRAVEN.

What else ?

LADY EPPING.

The conversation then became general. *I* talked while they listened.

CRAVEN.

Did you tell them the plot of a particular play ?

LADY EPPING.

[*As if she thought that a very silly question.*] Well, of course. That's what we're all here about.

CRAVEN.

What was the title of the particular play ?

LADY EPPING.

"Two Sins and a Woman."

CRAVEN.

Did Mr. Hughes make any comment ?

LADY EPPING.

None whatever. I see now that he must have been committing my plot to memory so that he could use it himself.

PERRY.

[*Rising to protest.*] My lord

LADY EPPING.

[*Stares at PERRY, then says to WRAY.*] Is he allowed to interrupt me like that?

WRAY.

He is quite within his rights.

LADY EPPING.

But I wasn't speaking to him at all. I was speaking to Mr. Craven.

WRAY.

It would be better if you did not cast reflections on the defendant.

LADY EPPING.

Very well, I'll accept that from *you* or Mr. Craven, but not from Mr. Perry. I'm not employing *him*.

CRAVEN.

What happened *after* tea on the fourteenth of July?

LADY EPPING.

I read an extract from "Two Sins and a Woman" to the defendant.

CRAVEN.

When did you next read "Two Sins and a Woman" to the defendant?

LADY EPPING.

At Cookie Castle in September.

CRAVEN.

Do you remember the twenty-fifth of September?

LADY EPPING.

[*Playfully.*] I thought you were going to say, "Do you remember the fifth of November?"

WRAY.

I think the exact quotation is, "*Please to remember the fifth of November.*"

[*General and prolonged laughter, in which WRAY joins.*]

PERRY.

[*Half rising as he says smiling.*] Another case of a plot which was suppressed.

[*A feeble laugh is raised at this jest but it is immediately suppressed by the USHER.*]

WRAY.

[*Sternly.*] If there is any more of this levity
I shall clear the Court.

CRAVEN.

[*Who has been impatient during the jokes.*]
Do you recall on the twenty-fifth of September
Miss Berengaria Mortimer coming to see you?

LADY EPPING.

I do.

WRAY.

Who is Miss Berengaria Mortimer?

MISS MORTIMER.

[*Surprised and in a tone of disappointment.*]
Oh!

CRAVEN.

The celebrated actress, my lord.

LADY EPPING.

[*Smiling at WRAY.*] Berry. You remember Berry!

WRAY.

[*In a reverie.*] Garia! [*He leans back as he says to CRAVEN.*] What are you waiting for, Mr. Craven?

CRAVEN.

What did Miss Berengaria Mortimer tell you?

LADY EPPING.

[*With serious indignation.*] The plot of Mr. Hughes' play—and no sooner had she let the cat out of the bag than I recognized it as my own child.

CRAVEN.

Yes—well—now I think you saw the first performance of the defendant's play, "Smoke without Fire"?

LADY EPPING.

I did. I thought it very weak—except in the places where it resembles mine—the rest of it bored me. Lucy can tell you. She was with me. Lady Lucy Lister. [*Pointing.*] She's sitting over there.

[*Every one turns to look at LUCY, who appears unconscious of their gaze.*]

WRAY.

Is Lady Lucy Lister to be called?

CRAVEN.

No, my lord.

WRAY.

[*Graciously.*] I'm sorry.

LUCY.

So am I. [*She bows graciously to WRAY.*]

CRAVEN.

What in your opinion are the salient points of resemblance between the two plays?

LADY EPPING.

The plots are just the same.

WRAY.

Most plots are.

[*Prolonged laughter in which WRAY joins.*]

CRAVEN.

Do you find any of the dialogue similar?

LADY EPPING.

I do. In my play Lady Dorincourt says to the Duke of Vere, "I hate you." In Mr. Hughes' play Mrs. What's-her-name says precisely the same thing to Mr. Whatever-his-name-is, and they all four say, "I love you."

CRAVEN.

Do you find any other resemblance?

LADY EPPING.

I do. Their third act passes in a bachelor's chambers at eleven o'clock at night, and so does mine.

CRAVEN.

Are there any *scenes* in the two plays which you consider similar?

LADY EPPING.

Yes. The scenes at the ends of the third acts.

CRAVEN.

Describe these scenes to the Jury in your own way.

LADY EPPING.

Well, in *their* play the husband finds the wife in the lover's rooms, and there's a lot of talk and a kind of struggle and the wife flops over on the hearth-rug. [*Continuing with great dramatic emphasis and point in the description of her own play.*] Now, in *my* play, Lord Dorincourt tears the portière aside and discovers—Lady Dorincourt. “Lilian, is that you?” he says and she says “Yes.” Then he turns to the Duke of Vere and says, “I never thought you would do such a thing.” And the Duke stands like this—[*with her arms by her sides and her head bent*] never says a word—just stands like this. [*Holding the pose a moment before she continues excitedly.*] Then Lord Dorincourt seizes the Duke of Vere by the throat and forces him to his knees. Lady Dorincourt rushes between them crying [*her arms wide apart and shrieking*], “Kill me!” [*She drops her arms and smiles.*] That's *my* curtain.

WRAY.

[*Pleasantly.*] A very pretty incident. [CRAVEN *sits.* PERRY *immediately rises.* WRAY *groans at the sight of PERRY.*] Oh!

[*He sits back extremely bored.* LADY EPPING'S *attitude towards PERRY is stubborn and antagonistic. She looks upon him as her enemy. PERRY'S manner at the beginning is pompous.*

PERRY.

Is it not true that you *offered* to tell Mr. Hughes the plot of your play?

LADY EPPING.

I don't remember.

PERRY.

Do you suggest that he *asked* you to tell it him?

LADY EPPING.

He may have done so.

PERRY.

Wormed it out of you?

LADY EPPING.

I don't think I know that expression.

PERRY.

Was Mrs. Hughes present?

LADY EPPING.

She may have been.

PERRY.

[*Exasperated, shouting.*] Was she?

LADY EPPING.

[*Also shouting.*] Yes!

PERRY.

I suppose you will not deny that on Sunday afternoon, the fourteenth of July, while you were having tea with a number of friends, you announced your intention of collaborating on a play with Mr. Hughes?

LADY EPPING.

You were there and heard me.

PERRY.

Will you kindly say if this is not so?

LADY EPPING.

It may have been.

PERRY.

[*Losing his temper.*] I don't want "It may have been" I want "yes" or "no." [LADY EPPING begins to draw on her glove in a leisurely manner, quite ignoring PERRY who becomes more exasperated.] Yes or no? [Pause.] Yes or no?

LADY EPPING.

[*Pleasantly to WRAY.*] Couldn't you come to us for Christmas ?

WRAY.

[*Smiles.*] M—— [*Solemnly.*] Now answer the question.

[*He busies himself with his notes.*]

LADY EPPING.

[*To PERRY.*] Would you mind saying it all over again ? I've forgotten what you asked me.

PERRY.

[*Disconcerted, he turns to a BARRISTER near him and says in a whisper.*] Do you remember what it was ?

BARRISTER.

I wasn't attending.

PERRY.

We will pass on to—to—yes—now—this great success you say you had when you played your own play before your own servants.

LADY EPPING.

I never said I played my own play before my own servants.

PERRY.

Yes you did.

LADY EPPING.

No, I didn't.

PERRY.

You said just now you had a great success at Cookie Castle before an audience mainly composed of servants.

LADY EPPING.

Not *my* servants.

PERRY.

Whose servants?

LADY EPPING.

My father's.

PERRY.

Well, well, well, your father's servants then. We won't quarrel about that. I suppose your father's servants had to applaud you?

LADY EPPING.

Do you?

PERRY.

Had they?

WRAY.

That is a question for Lady Epping's father's servants.

LADY EPPING.

[*Cheerfully.*] A very good retort. I nearly made it myself. [*To PERRY.*] Well, anything else?

PERRY.

You are not allowed to ask me questions.

LADY EPPING.

My own side will correct me when necessary.

PERRY.

This question of the third acts both passing in a bachelor's chambers. I suppose you don't think you have the exclusive right to use a bachelor's chambers at 11 o'clock at night?

LADY EPPING.

[*Indignantly.*] How dare you say such a thing? As if I should ever dream ——

PERRY.

I mean—to use them—in an artistic sense.

LADY EPPING.

Don't attempt to explain; let us pass away from this very disagreeable incident.

PERRY.

“I love you.”

LADY EPPING.

[*Surprised, she draws herself up.*] Mr. Perry!

PERRY.

"I hate you."

LADY EPPING.

[*Realizing that he is quoting from her play.*]
Oh, I see.

WRAY.

[*Waking up.*] What was that? Really, Mr. Perry, I must take exception to your language.

PERRY.

I was quoting Lady Epping.

WRAY.

That's no excuse. Lady Epping is not supposed to know the etiquette of the Court and you are.

PERRY.

I am obliged to your lordship. These lines "I love you" and "I hate you"—don't you realize that they are very commonplace?

LADY EPPING.

I do now.

PERRY.

Didn't you realize that as you wrote them?

LADY EPPING.

No—it was as you spoke them.

[Slight general laughter.]

PERRY.

I really must ask you to treat me with more respect.

LADY EPPING.

[Smiling indulgently.] Poor little Mr. Perry!

PERRY.

[Indignantly.] Oh!

[He sits down nearly crying with rage.]

CRAVEN.

Lady Epping—it has been suggested that you *insisted* on telling Mr. Hughes the plot of your play?

LADY EPPING.

Only by Mr. Perry.

CRAVEN.

Is it true that you forced your play on the defendant's attention?

LADY EPPING.

No. He *wormed* it out of me.

CRAVEN.

Thank you.

[He sits down.]

LADY EPPING.

Can I come out? [CRAVEN bows to her. Leaving the witness-box, she says to WRAY.] Good-bye! [She waves her hand to him—then rejoins LORD EPPING.] Now are you satisfied?

USHER.

Sh, sh!

LADY EPPING.

[Staring at the USHER.] I'm the plaintiff.

[Sits beside LORD EPPING.]

CRAVEN.

[To WRAY.] That is the plaintiff's case, my lord. [He then sits.]

PERRY.

[Rising to address WRAY.] May it please your lordship—

WRAY.

[Groaning at the sight of PERRY.] Oh!

PERRY.

Gentlemen of the Jury. My learned friend, in his opening speech, asked you to remember that the plaintiff, though a countess, is also a woman. At the same time he has lost no opportunity of reminding you that, though a woman, she is also a countess—as if on that account she has a special claim upon your sym-

pathies. Now, gentlemen—I hope you will not be snobs, but like the free-born lower-middle class Britons that you probably are—you will support a poor defendant against a rich plaintiff—whatever the rights of the case. [*Dropping his voice to a sad tone.*] The defendant, gentlemen, is no charming woman—such as you have just seen. He is merely—a man. [*With sudden fire.*] But he is an Englishman!

A BOY.

Hooray!

PERRY.

—with all those fine and noble qualities which have made Englishmen—what we are. Courage, veracity, brawn, all the domestic and conjugal virtues coupled with a taste for sport. Could such a man be guilty of robbing a woman? This story, gentlemen, which Lady Epping claims to have invented is literally as old as Adam. Who are the eternal hero, heroine and villain of drama but Adam and Eve and the Serpent? Boil almost every play down to its component parts and you find our three old friends at the bottom of the pot. [*Working himself up to a final burst of indignation.*] Are we to hand over the copyright of the book of Genesis to Lady Epping? Did *she* create Adam and Eve? Is *she* the author of their fall? Did *she* invent sin, and are *we* not to be

allowed to participate in it? Gentlemen, are you going to surrender this precious heritage, or will you rise in your might and give a brother Englishman fair play!

[He sits down exhausted by his great effort. There is some applause.]

USHER.

Sh, sh!

WRAY.

This demonstration is really most uncalled for.

PERRY.

[Rising and still exhausted.] Mr. Paul Hughes.

EVELYN.

[To MISS MORTIMER.] He'll never be able to answer their questions; he'll be worse than he was at the interview.

[PAUL enters the witness-box.]

ASSOCIATE.

[Gabbling incoherently as before.] Take the Book in your right hand. The evidence you shall give to the Court and Jury touching the matter in the question shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Kiss the Book.

[PAUL kisses the Book and returns it.]

PERRY.

You are the defendant, and you live at "Monrepos," Edgware Road?

PAUL.

Yes, my lord.

WRAY.

Please don't address Mr. Perry as My lord.

PAUL.

[*To WRAY.*] No, sir.

WRAY.

[*Severely.*] Don't be facetious.

PAUL.

I didn't mean to —

WRAY.

Don't talk so much. [*As he leans back.*] I really must put a stop to all this chattering and frivolity.

PERRY.

Do you remember the fourteenth of July?

PAUL.

Yes, my wife and I were staying at Epping House. Lady Epping read me extracts from several of her plays.

PERRY.

Tell us briefly the circumstances.

PAUL.

It was after tea. [*To WRAY.*] You'd just gone out for a walk with Lady Beacroft —

WRAY.

Address your remarks to the Jury.

PAUL.

[*To JURY.*] The Judge and Lady Beacroft —

WRAY.

[*Interrupting impatiently.*] No, no, no. We don't want this.

PERRY.

Did you steal any of Lady Epping's ideas? [*CRAVEN laughs. PERRY angrily to CRAVEN.*] Don't interrupt while I am examining the witness. [*To PAUL.*] Did you steal any of Lady Epping's ideas?

WRAY.

That is a question for the Jury, Mr. Perry.

PERRY.

I am obliged to your lordship. [*To PAUL.*] Then I may take it you did *not* steal any of Lady Epping's ideas?

PAUL.

No. [*He adds hastily.*] Yes.

WRAY.

[*Impatiently.*] Which d'you mean—no or yes?

PAUL.

If he means did I steal them, I mean ——

WRAY.

[*Angrily.*] Don't trifle with the Court, Mr. Hughes. Remember you are on your oath.

PAUL.

[*Submissively.*] Yes.

WRAY.

[*To PERRY.*] Yes. He *did* steal them.

PAUL.

[*Desperately.*] No.

WRAY.

[*Exasperated.*] Well, which is it? Yes or no?

PERRY.

I think he means "yes."

CRAVEY.

[*Springing up.*] I object to the way my learned friend is leading the witness.

PERRY.

[*Pompously.*] I will put the question in another way. Did you or did you not steal any

of Lady Epping's ideas? [CRAVEN *laughs*. PERRY *losing his temper*.] My lord, I cannot proceed with my examination if my friend continues to titter at everything I say.

CRAVEN.

I didn't titter. I laughed.

PERRY.

[*Angrily*.] You tittered.

WRAY.

[*Looking up suddenly*.] Eh? What's the matter? [*Angrily to PAUL*.] Why don't you answer the questions? Stand up straight and take your hands out of your pockets. You are a most unsatisfactory witness.

EVELYN.

[*To Miss Mortimer*.] Isn't the Judge hard upon him?

PERRY.

Your play "Smoke without Fire" did not run very long, I think?

PAUL.

Three weeks.

PERRY.

Ah! A complete failure.

PAUL.

A succès d'estime.

PERRY.

In spite of your play being such a disastrous succès d'estime, Lady Epping claims to be the author?

PAUL.

She says our plots are just alike.

WRAY.

I once heard a learned judge say, "Most plots are."

[General laughter in which WRAY joins.]

PERRY.

[To WRAY.] That is our defense, my lord. Our author claims that it is impossible to write an entirely original play. They have all been written. One more question: Is your play, in your opinion, entirely original?

PAUL.

It is.

[PERRY, having finished his examination, sits. CRAVEN rises to cross-examine.]

CRAVEN.

We have heard that on Sunday afternoon, the fourteenth of July, the plaintiff read you an extract from "Two Sins and a Woman."

PAUL.

Yes.

CRAVEN.

The play was produced ——

WRAY.

[*Interrupting.*] But I thought it never was produced.

CRAVEN.

[*Irritably to WRAY.*] If your lordship will allow me to finish my sentence—[*to PAUL*] the play was produced from a black tin box. [*To his CLERK.*] Have we the black tin box in Court?

[*The CLERK produces the black tin box which was used in the first act.*]

WRAY.

As you can't produce the play, you produce the black tin box.

[*Prolonged laughter in which WRAY joins.*]

CRAVEN.

[*To PAUL.*] Is that the box in which Lady Epping keeps her plays?

PAUL.

I believe so.

CRAVEN.

Did you see that box at Cookie Castle?

PAUL.

Yes—I think so.

CRAVEN.

[*Impressively.*] No—don't think so—be sure.

PAUL.

Yes.

WRAY.

Let me see the box. [*It is handed up to WRAY who taps it, then opens it and peers inside.*] I think the Jury ought to see this. [*As ASSOCIATE rises slowly.*] Make haste please or I may drop it on the Usher's head.

[*It is handed to the JURY.*]

CRAVEN.

There is a remarkable thing about that box. It won't lock. [*A sensation in Court.*] You had easy access to that box?

PAUL.

No.

CRAVEN.

But it won't lock.

PAUL.

Oh!

CRAVEN.

I suggest to you that the box won't lock.

PAUL.

I'll take your word for it.

CRAVEN.

I further suggest that it was perfectly simple for you to take the play out of the box had you so desired.

PAUL.

No.

CRAVEN.

You knew where Lady Epping kept the box?

PAUL.

Yes.

WRAY.

Where did she keep it?

PAUL.

Under her bed.

[Laughter, immediately suppressed.]

CRAVEN.

You are a successful dramatist?

PAUL.

I believe so.

CRAVEN.

Altogether a most exemplary young man.

PAUL.

That is a question for the Jury.

WRAY.

[*Sweetly to CRAVEN.*] Will you give us your definition of an exemplary young man, Mr. Craven?

[*Prolonged laughter in which WRAY joins.*]

CRAVEN.

[*Impressively.*] Indirectly, my lord—by proving that the defendant is not one.

[*A general rustle in Court, murmurs, movement, whispering, etc.*]

LUCY.

[*To LORD EPPING.*] That's what they call sensation!

USHER.

Sh, sh!

CRAVEN.

My learned friend in his opening speech scorned the suggestion that you have robbed Lady Epping because you are such a model of all the domestic and conjugal virtues.

PAUL.

Yes.

CRAVEN.

As a matter of fact, I think you are separated from your wife.

PAUL.

[*Eagerly.*] I can explain that.

CRAVEN.

[*Severely.*] I won't trouble you for an explanation. You *are* separated from your wife?

PAUL.

It's all about a letter.

CRAVEN.

What letter?

PAUL.

A letter which was addressed to me and which fell into my wife's hands.

CRAVEN.

A compromising letter?

PAUL.

[*Hesitating.*] Well —

WRAY.

[*Severely.*] Answer the question. Was the letter compromising?

PAUL.

Yes —

CRAVEN.

[*Triumphantly.*] Ah!

PAUL.

—— in a way.

WRAY.

Do stop talking. I never heard anything like the way you run on with irrelevant remarks. Who was the letter from?

PAUL.

I don't remember.

WRAY.

Don't remember! Don't remember!

PAUL.

No, my lord—I do not remember.

CRAVEN.

My lord, I believe Mrs. Paul Hughes is in court. No doubt she will remember.

PAUL.

[*Losing his head.*] No, she doesn't. Neither of us do, but if your lordship insists, I will write the lady's name on a piece of paper.

WRAY.

Yes, you'd better. [PAUL *writes a name on a page of his pocketbook.* *It is passed to* WRAY.

WRAY reads the paper, then gives a little scream of surprise and amusement.] Oh!

[He leans back in his chair, smiling, covers his face with his handkerchief and ogles LADY EPPING over the top of it.

PERRY.

[With the letter in his hand.] My lord, it was not my intention to use this letter, but since my friend has introduced the subject I propose to put it in as evidence.

WRAY.

Evidence of what?

PERRY.

Evidence that this is nothing but a trumped-up case.

CRAVEN.

[Springs up, protesting.] Oh! my lord!

WRAY.

Sit down, Mr. Craven.

[CRAVEN does so and leaning over reads the letter in PERRY'S hand.

PERRY.

I submit that this letter clearly shows that the plaintiff and the defendant had quarreled—that it was a quarrel of a most private and in-

timate character. I further submit that her ladyship's only motive in bringing this action is revenge.

CRAVEN.

[*Rising.*] My lord, this letter cannot be material to any of the issues raised.

WRAY.

It was you who introduced the letter, Mr. Craven. I think we must have it.

LADY EPPING.

[*To CRAVEN.*] No, no!

PERRY.

I will read the letter. It begins ——

CRAVEN.

My lord, I protest ——

LADY EPPING.

[*To CRAVEN.*] Snatch it.

PERRY.

[*Holding the letter high up so that CRAVEN cannot snatch it and raising his voice to be heard.*] “My dear ——”

CRAVEN.

[*Protesting.*] My lord ——

PERRY.

"My dear ——"

WRAY.

[*Raising his voice angrily.*] Gentlemen, gentlemen! Perhaps it will be sufficient if I read the letter.

PERRY.

As your lordship pleases.

[*The letter is handed to WRAY, who reads it with an expression of surprise and amusement.*

WRAY.

I think we must hear what the plaintiff has to say about this letter. Let Lady Epping come back into the box.

[*LADY EPPING is reluctant to re-enter the box. LORD EPPING, CRAVEN and her SOLICITOR urge her. She rises slowly and goes towards the box, meeting PAUL as he steps out of it so that they almost collide. PAUL steps aside and says, "I beg your pardon."* LADY EPPING enters the box.

PERRY.

Hand the letter to the witness. [*The letter is taken from WRAY and handed to LADY EPPING.*] Did you write that letter?

LADY EPPING.

[*Sweetly.*] I must read it before I can be sure, mustn't I? [*She peruses the letter.*]

PERRY.

Did you write that letter?

LADY EPPING.

It *is* something like my writing.

PERRY.

[*Triumphantly.*] Ah!

LADY EPPING.

That's not saying I wrote it.

PERRY.

You admit the writing resembles yours.

LADY EPPING.

But there's so much similarity in handwriting, you see. Modern women are so much alike. We talk alike and dress alike, and all look about thirty, so it's not surprising if we all write alike.

PERRY.

I am not asking you for general statements. I am asking you if you wrote that letter.

LADY EPPING.

I submit it has no bearing on the issues.

WRAY.

[*Sharply.*] Answer the question.

LADY EPPING.

[*Floundering.*] The question !

PERRY.

Did you write —— ?

LADY EPPING.

I write so many letters.

PERRY.

Did you —— ?

LADY EPPING.

I'm trying to think.

PERRY.

Did —— ?

LADY EPPING.

September the twenty-fifth. Now what did I do on September the twenty-fifth ? Oh, I know—I went to Peckham to open some baths and then—then ——

WRAY.

[*Shouting.*] Did you write that letter ?

LADY EPPING.

[*Pretending to read the letter.*] “Dear Mr. Hughes. Can you lunch here on Tuesday ? Just ourselves. Do come. F. Epping.” I can

quite believe I wrote that. I write dozens and dozens of letters every day.

EVELYN.

[*To MISS MORTIMER.*] Oh, that wasn't the letter she wrote at all.

LADY EPPING.

How can I possibly remember them all three months after? Who could? [*She tears the letter into little bits as she says recklessly.*] Ask any woman if she can remember.

[*As soon as LADY EPPING begins to tear up the letter, PERRY flies to the witness-box to try and stop her. General movement. The whole Court rises in great excitement shouting and gesticulating.*

PERRY.

Stop, stop! My lord!

WRAY.

Lady Epping! Lady Epping!

USHER.

[*Dancing about in front of the witness-box.*] Hi! Hi! Stop that!

LADY EPPING.

Go away. [*She waves USHER and PERRY aside.*] Oh, look what I've done!

[She scatters the bits of paper with both hands. The people in Court resume their seats.]

WRAY.

[Solemnly.] Are you aware that you have committed two most grave offenses?

LADY EPPING.

[Alarmed.] What?

WRAY.

Your conduct amounts to perjury and contempt of Court.

LADY EPPING.

What?

WRAY.

You have sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, yet you deliberately make false statements and destroy documentary evidence. Never have I met with anything so flagrant. I must commit you to the cells.

LADY EPPING.

[Uttering a piercing shriek.] Oh! *[Great sensation in court. Much movement and incoherent talking. LADY EPPING moaning when silence is restored.]* The cells! *[Hysterically to WRAY.]* Oh, my lord—how should I know

I'd committed a crime? I'm very sorry. I'll apologize to the whole bar.

WRAY.

[*Restraining her with a gesture.*] You really did not know you were committing an offense in tearing up that letter?

LADY EPPING.

No, no—indeed I didn't. I tore it up—because I always tear up letters as I've read them. I never thought I should be sent to prison for it.

WRAY.

[*To COUNSEL.*] I think we had better accept Lady Epping's apology and proceed with the case.

LADY EPPING.

[*Distractedly.*] Oh, no, no. Let's drop it and get out. [*To CRAVEN and PERRY.*] You two settle it between you. I'll pay all the costs out of my own pocket. If you can't get the money from my husband try my sister-in-law—[*points to MISS VANDERHIDE*] Lady. Oswald Bruce-Bannerman. I withdraw my case.

WRAY.

You may withdraw your case if you choose but to withdraw it now looks rather ——

LADY EPPING.

My lord—may I be allowed to explain ?

WRAY.

Certainly.

LADY EPPING.

May it please your lordship, gentlemen of the jury—it has nothing to do with the letter. I withdraw my case because I have no case to withdraw. Mr. Craven ought never to have allowed me to bring this action. [CRAVEN *bangs his papers down on to the bench in front of him in a great rage.*] I saw that during Mr. Perry's very able speech . . . [PERRY *rises and bows*] about Adam and Eve and Satan. This is not a case of plagiarism at all. It is a case of coincidence—one of those instances of two clever people both thinking the same thing. I will only add—I'm surprised Mr. Craven couldn't see it.

[HICKORY *laughs* ; CRAVEN *turns upon him angrily.*

WRAY.

Before the Court rises, I should like to compliment everybody concerned upon the able way in which this case has been conducted. I agree with Lady Epping it should never have been brought, yet the experience will not have

been in vain if it teaches both the plaintiff and the defendant the folly of trying to shine outside their legitimate spheres. Mr. Hughes, the author—posing as a man of fashion: Lady Epping, not content with her countess's coronet, trying to find room on her head for a wreath of laurel leaves. What a sorry spectacle! As incongruous as if a judge should mistake himself for a jester. [*Loud laughter from every one in court except WRAY, who looks indignantly around him. The USHER, seeing they are laughing in the wrong place at once excitedly quells the laughter. There is immediate silence.*] Mr. Hughes, my advice to you is this—Get out of the smart set as quickly as you can and stick to your work and your wife. [*To LADY EPPING.*] Lady Epping—you have told us it is your habit to tear up your letters.

LADY EPPING.

Yes.

WRAY.

Extend it to your plays.

CURTAIN

50493

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